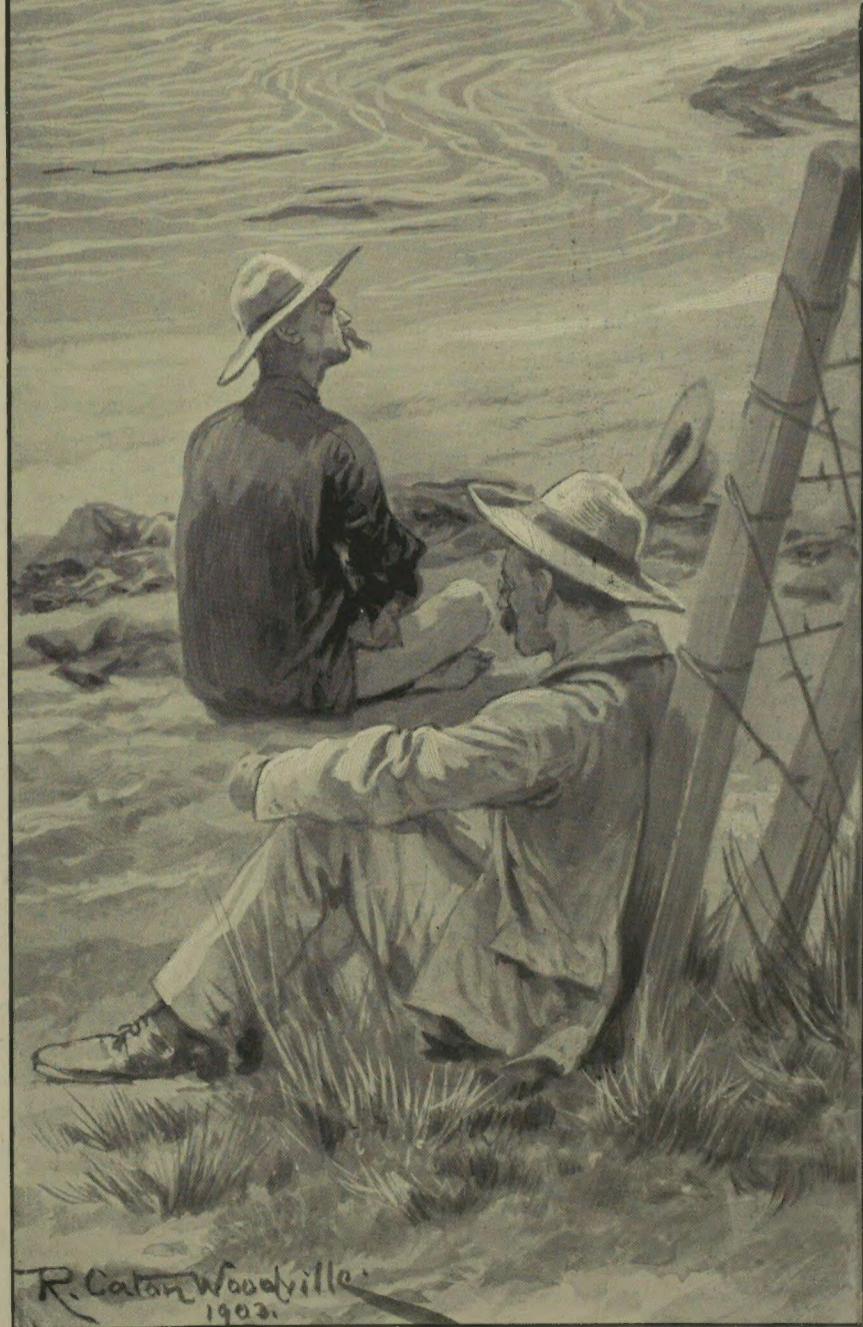


THE CAPTIVE.

BY
RUDYARD KIPLING.



R. Caton Woodville
1903.

HE THAT BELIEVEH SHALL NOT MAKE HASTE.—*Isaiah*.

THE GUARD-BOAT lay across the mouth of the bathing-pool, her crew idly spanking the water with the flat of their oars. A red-coated Militiaman, rifle in hand, sat at the bows, and a petty officer at the stern. Between the snow-white cutter and the flat-topped, honey-coloured rocks on the beach the green water was troubled with shrimp-pink prisoners of war bathing. Behind their orderly tin camp and the electric-light poles rose those stone-dotted spurs that throw heat on Simonstown. Before them the little *Barracouta* nodded to the big *Gibraltar*, and the old *Penelope*, that in ten years has been a bachelors' club, natural history museum, kindergarten, and prison, rooted and dug at her fixed moorings. Far out, a three-funnelled Atlantic transport with turtle bow and stern waddled in from the deep sea.

Said the sentry, assured of the visitor's good faith, "Talk to 'em? You can to any that speak English. You'll find a lot that do."

Here and there earnest groups gathered round ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church who doubtless preached conciliation, but the majority preferred their bath. The God who Looks after Small Things had caused the visitor that day to receive two weeks' delayed mails *en bloc* from a casual postman, and the whole heavy bundle of newspapers, tied in a strap, he dangled ostentatiously as bait. At the edge of the beach, cross-legged, undressed to his sky-blue Army shirt, sat a lean, ginger-haired man, evidently on guard over a dozen heaps of clothing. His eyes followed the incoming Atlantic boat.

"Excuse me, Mister," he said, without turning (and the speech betrayed his nationality), "would you mind keeping away from these garments? I've been elected janitor—on the Dutch vote."

The visitor moved over against the barbed-wire fence and sat down to his mail. At the rustle of the newspaper-wrappers the ginger-coloured man turned quickly—the hunger of a print-ridden people in his close-set iron-grey eyes.

"Have you any use for papers?" said the visitor.

"Have I any use?"—a lean, curved forefinger was already ripping off the outer covers. "Why, that's the New York postmark. Give

me the ads at the back of *Harper's* and *McClure*, and I'm in touch with God's country again! Did you know how I was aching for papers?"

The visitor told the tale of the casual postman.

"Providential!" said the ginger-coloured man, keen as a terrier on his task. "Both in time and matter. Yes! . . . The *Scientific American* yet once more! Oh, it's good! It's good!" His voice broke as he pressed his hawk-like nose against the heavily inked patent specifications at the end. "Can I keep it? I thank you—I thank you! Why—why—well—well! The *American Tyler* of all things created! Do you subscribe to that?"

"I'm on the free list," said the visitor, nodding.

He extended his blue-tanned hand with that air of Oriental spaciousness which distinguishes the native-born American, and met the visitor's grasp expertly. "I can only say that you have treated me like a brother (yes, I'll take every last one you can spare), and if ever—" He plucked at the bosom of his shirt. "Psha! I forgot I'd no card on me; but my name's Zigler—Laughton O. Zigler. An American? If Ohio's still in the Union, I am, Sir. But I'm no extreme States' rights man. I've used all of my native country and a few others as I have found occasion, and now I am the captive of your bow and spear. I'm not kicking at that. I'm not a coerced alien, nor a naturalised Texas mule-tender, nor an adventurer on the instalment plan. I don't tag after our Consul when he comes around, expecting the American Eagle to lift me out o' here by the slack of my pants. No, Sir! If a Britisher went into Indian territory and shot up his surroundings with a Colt automatic (not that she's any sort of weapon; but I take her for an illustration), he'd be strung up quicker'n a snowflake 'ud melt in hell. No ambassador of yours 'ud save him. I'm ahead my neck on this game, anyway. That's how I regard the proposition.

"Have I gone gunning against the British? To a certain extent. I presume you never heard of the Laughton-Zigler automatic two-inch field-gun, with self-feeding hopper, single oil-cylinder recoil, and ball-bearing gear throughout? Or Laughtite, the new explosive, absolutely uniform in effect, and one-ninth the bulk of any present effete charge—flake, cannonite, cordite, troisdorf, cellulose, cocoa, cord, or prism—I don't care what it is? Laughtite's immense. So's the Zigler automatic. That's me—that's fifteen years of me. You're not a gun-sharp? I'm sorry. I could have surprised you. Apart from my gun, my tale don't amount to much of anything. I thank you, but I don't use any tobacco you'd be likely to carry. . . . Bull Durham? *Bull Durham!* I take it all back—every last word. My God! Bull Durham—here! If ever you strike Akron, Ohio, when this fool-war's over, remember you've Laughton O. Zigler in your vest pocket. Including the city of Akron. We've a little club there. . . . Hell! What's the sense of talking Akron with no pants on?

"For two cents I'd have shipped her to our Filipeens. Came mighty near it, too; but from what I'd read in the papers, you can't trust Aguinaldo's crowd on scientific matters. Why don't I offer it to our army? Well, you've an effete aristocracy running yours, and we've a crowd of politicians. The results are practically identical. I am not taking any U.S. army in mine.

"I went to Amsterdam with her—to this Dutch junta that supposes it's bossing the war. I wasn't brought up to love the British for one thing, and for another I knew that if she got in her fine work (my gun) I'd stand more chance of receiving an unbiased report from a crowd o' dam-fool British officers than from a hatful of politicians' nephews doing duty as commissaries and ordnance sharps. As I said, I put the brown man out of the question. That's the way I regarded the proposition.

"The Dutch in Holland don't amount to a row of pins. Maybe I misjudge 'em. Maybe they've been swindled too often by self-seeking adventurers to know a disinterested enthusiast when they see him. Anyway, they're slower than the Wrath o' God. On delusions—as to their winning out next Thursday week at 9 a.m.—they are quite British.

"I'll tell you a curious thing, too. I fought 'em for ten days before I could get the financial side of my game fixed to my liking. I knew they didn't believe in the Zigler, but they'd no call to be crazy-mean. I fixed 'em—free passage and freight for me and her to Delagoa Bay, and beyond by steam an' rail. Then I went aboard to see her crated, and there I struck my fellow-passengers—all deadheads, same as me. Well, Sir, I turned round in my tracks and besieged the ticket-office, and I said, 'Look at here, Van Dunk. I'm paying for my passage and her room in the hold—every square and cubic foot.' Guess he knocked down the fare to himself; but I paid. I wasn't going to deadhead with that crowd of Pentecostal sweepings. 'Twould have hoodooed my gun for all time. That was the way I regarded the proposition. No, Sir, they weren't pretty company.

"When we struck Pretoria I had a hell-and-a-half of a time trying to interest the Dutch vote in the Zigler automatic. The bottom was out of things rather much just about that time. Kruger was praying some and stealing some, and the Hollander lot was singing, 'If you haven't any money you needn't come round.' Nobody was spending his dough on anything except tickets to Europe. I was neglected. We were both grossly neglected. When I think how I used to give performances in the public streets with dummy cartridges, filling the hopper and turning the handle till

the sweat dropped off me, I blush. I've made her do her stunts before Kaffirs—naked sons of Ham—in Commissioner Street, trying to get a hold somewhere.

"Did I talk? I despise exaggeration—'tain't American or scientific—but as true as I'm sitting here like a blue-ended baboon in a kloof, Teddy Roosevelt's Western tour was a maiden's sigh compared to my advertising work.

"Long in the spring I was rescued by a Commandant called Van Zyl—a big, fleshy man with a lame leg. Take away his hair and his gun and he'd make a first-class Schenectady bar-keep. He found me and the Zigler on the veldt (Pretoria wasn't wholesome just about then), and he annexed me in a somnambulistic sort o' way. He was dead against the war from the start, but, being a Dutchman, he fought a sight better than the rest of that 'God and the Mauser outfit. Adrian Van Zyl slept a heap in the daytime—and didn't love niggers. I liked him. I was the only foreigner in his commando. The rest was—well, have you ever been among the Crackers? That's what they was—Georgia Crackers and Pennsylvania Dutch—with a dash o' Philadelphia lawyer. I could tell you things about them would surprise you. Religion for one thing; women for another; but I don't know as their notions o' geography weren't the craziest. Guess that must be some sort of automatic compensation. There wasn't one blamed ant-hill in their district they didn't know and use; but the world was flat, they said, and England was a day's trek from Cape Town.

"They could fight in their own way, and don't you forget it. But I guess you won't. They fought to kill, and, by what I could make out, the British fought to be killed; so both parties were accommodated.

"I am the captive of your bow and spear, Sir. The position has its obligations—on both sides. You could not be offensive or partisan to me. I cannot for the same reason be offensive to you. Therefore I will not give you my opinions on the conduct of the war.

"Anyway, I didn't take the field as an offensive partisan, but as an inventor. It was a condition and not a theory that confronted me. (Yes, Sir, I'm a Democrat by connection, and that was one of the best things Grover ever got off.)

"After three months' trek, old man Van Zyl had his commando in good shape and refitted off the British, and he reckoned he'd wait on a British General of his acquaintance that did business on a circuit between Stompies-neuk, Jackhalputs, Vrelegen, and Odendaalstroom, year in and year out. He was a fixture in that section.

"He's a dam' good man, says Van Zyl. 'He's a friend of mine. He sent in a fine doctor when I was wounded and our Hollander doc. wanted to cut my leg off. Ya, I'll guess we'll stay with him.' Up to date me and the Zigler had lived in innocuous disquietude owing to little odds and ends riding out of gear. How in thunder was I to know there wasn't the ghost of any road in the country? No axles could stand up under it. But raw hide's cheap and lastin'. I guess I'll make my next gun a thousand pounds heavier, though.

"Well, Sir, we struck the old man on his beat—Vrelegen it was—and our crowd opened with the usual compliments at two thousand yards. Van Zyl shook himself into his greasy old saddle and says: 'Now we shall be quite happy, Mr. Zigler. No more dam trekking. Joost twelve miles a day till the apricots are ripe.'

"Then we hitched on to his outposts, and vedettes, and cossack piquets, or whatever they was, and we wandered round the veldt arm in arm like brothers.

"The way we worked lodge was this way. The General, he had his breakfast at 8.45 a.m. to the tick (might have been a Long Island Commuter). At 8.42 a.m. I'd go down to the Thirty-fourth Street ferry to meet him—I mean I'd see the Zigler into position at two thousand (I began at three, but that was too cold and distant)—and blow him off to two full hoppers—eighteen rounds—just as they were bringing in his ham. If his crowd was busy celebrating the anniversary of Waterloo or the last royal kid's birthday, they'd open on me with two guns (I'll tell you about them later on), but if they were disengaged they'd all stand to their horses and pile on the regulation ironmongery, washers, and typewriters, and five weeks' grub, and in half an hour they'd sail out after me and the rest of Van Zyl's boys, lying down and firing till 11.45 a.m. or maybe high noon. Then we'd go from labour to refreshment, resuming at 2 p.m. and battling till tea-time. Tuesdays and Fridays was the General's moving day. He'd trek ahead ten or twelve miles, and we'd loaf around his flankers and exercise the ponies a piece. Sometimes he'd get hung up in a drift—stalled crossin' a crick—and we'd make playful snatches at his wagons. First time that happened I turned the Zigler loose with high hopes, Sir; but the old man was well posted on rearguards with a gun to 'em, and I had to haul her back with two mules instead o' six. I was pretty mad. I wasn't looking for any experts back of the Royal British Artillery. Otherwise, the game was mostly even. He'd lay out three or four of our commando, and we'd gather in four or five of his once a week or thereon. One time, I remember, long towards dusk we saw 'em burying five of their boys. They stood pretty thick around the graves. We wasn't more than fifteen hundred yards off, but old Van Zyl wouldn't fire. He just took off his hat at the proper time. He said if you stretched a man at prayers you'd have to hump his bad luck as well as your own. I am inclined to agree with him. So we browsed



He found me and the Zigler on the veldt.

along week in and week out. A war-sharp might have judged it sort of docile, but for an inventor needing practice one day and peace the next for checking his theories, it suited Laughton O. Zigler.

"And friendly. Friendly was no word for it. We was brothers in arms.

"Why, I knew the two guns of the Royal British Artillery as well as I used to know the old Fifth Avenue stages. *They* might have been brothers too.

"They'd jolt into action and wiggle around and skid and spit and cough and prize 'emselves back again during our hours of bloody battle till I could have wept, Sir, at the spectacle of modern white men chained up to these old hand-power, back-number, flint-and-steel reaping machines. One of 'em—I called her Baldy—she'd a long white scar all along her barrel—I'd made sure of twenty times. I knew her crew by sight, but she'd come twitching and teturing out of the dust of my shells like—like a hen from under a buggy, and she'd dip into a gully, and next thing I'd know 'ud be her old nose peeking over the ridge looking for us. Her runnin' mate had two grey mules in the lead, and a natural-wood wheel repainted, and a whole raft of rope-ends trailin' around. 'Yever see Tom Reed with his vest off, steerin' Congress through a heat-wave? I've been to Washin'ton often—too much—workin' my patents. I called her Tom Reed. We three 'ud play pussy-wants-a-corner all round the outposts on off-days—cross-lots through the sage and along the mezas till we was short-circuited by cañons. Oh, it was great for me and Baldy and Tom Reed! I don't know as we didn't neglect our legitimate business sometimes for this ball-play. *I* know I did.

"Long towards the fall they grew shy—hung back in their breeching sort of—and their shooting was way—way off. I observed they wasn't taking any chances, not though I acted kitten almost underneath 'em.

"I mentioned it to Van Zyl, because it struck me I'd about knocked their Royal British moral endways.

"'No,' says he, rocking as usual on his cayuse. 'My Captain Mankeltow he is sick. That's all.'

"'So's his guns,' I said. 'I'm going to make 'em a heap sicker before he gets well.'

"'No,' says Van Zyl. 'He has had the enteric a little. Now he is better, and he was let out from hospital at Jackhalputs. Ah, that Mankeltow! He always makes me laugh so. I told him—long back—at Colesberg, I had a little home for him at Nootgedacht. But he would not come—no! He has been sick, and I am sorry.'

"'How d'you get on to it?' I says.

"'Why, only to-day he sends back his love by Johanna Neikerk, that goes into their camp for her sick baby's eyes. He sends his love, that

Mankeltow, and he tells her tell me he has a little garden of roses all ready for me in the Dutch Indies—Umballa. He is very funny, my Captain Mankeltow.'

"The Dutch and the English ought to get on well, Sir. They've the same notions of humour, to my thinking.

"'When he gets well,' says Van Zyl, 'you look out, Mr. American. He comes back to his guns next Tuesday. Then they shoot better.'

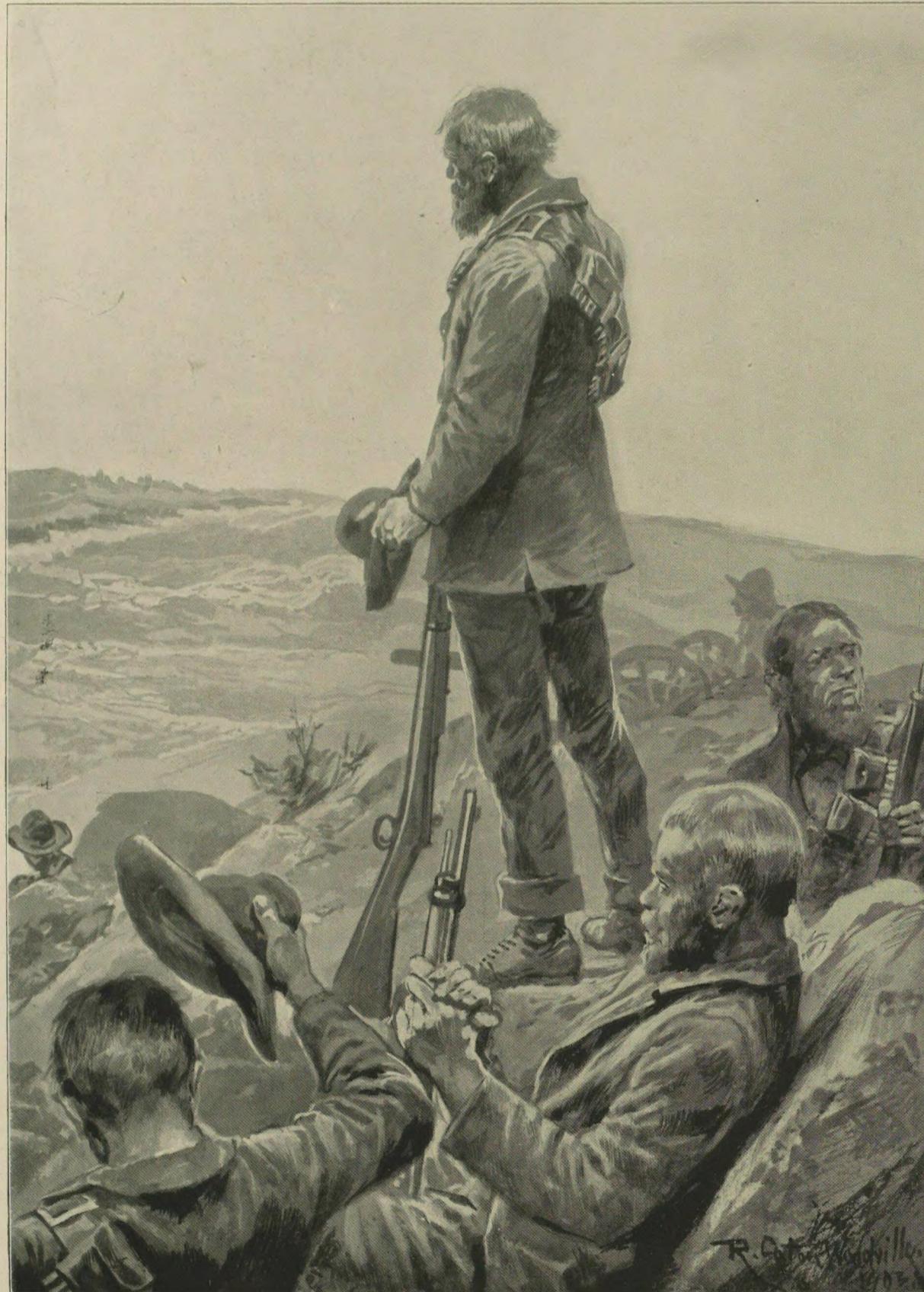
"I wasn't so dam well acquainted with the Royal British Artillery as old man Van Zyl. I knew this Captain Mankeltow by sight of course, and, considering what sort of a man with the hoe he was, I thought he'd done right well against the Zigler. But nothing epoch-making.

"Next morning at the usual time I waited on the General, and old

Van Zyl come along with some of the boys. Van Zyl didn't hang around the Zigler much as a rule, but this was his luck that day.

"He was peeking through his glasses at the camp, and I was helping pepper the General's sow-belly—just as usual—when he turns round to me quick and says, 'Almighty! how all these Englishmen are liars! You cannot trust one,' he says. 'Captain Mankeltow tells our Johanna he is not back till Tuesday, and there he is! Almighty! the English are all Chamberlains!'

"If the old man hadn't stopped to make political speeches he'd have had his supper in laager that night, I guess. I was busy attending to Tom Reed when Baldy got in her fine work on me. I saw one sheet of white flame wrapped round the hopper, and in the middle of it there was a mule straight on end. Nothing out of the way in a mule on end, but this mule hadn't any head. I remember it struck me as interesting at the time, and when I'd ciphered it out I was doing the Santos-Dumont act without



He just took off his hat at the proper time.

any balloon and the motor out of gear. Then I got to thinking about Santos-Dumont and how much better my way was. Then I thought about Professor Langley and the Smithsonian, and wishing I hadn't lied so extravagantly in some of my specifications at Washington. Then I quit thinking for quite a while, and when I resumed my train of thought I was nude, Sir, in a very stale stretcher, and my mouth was full of fine dirt all flavoured with Laughtite.

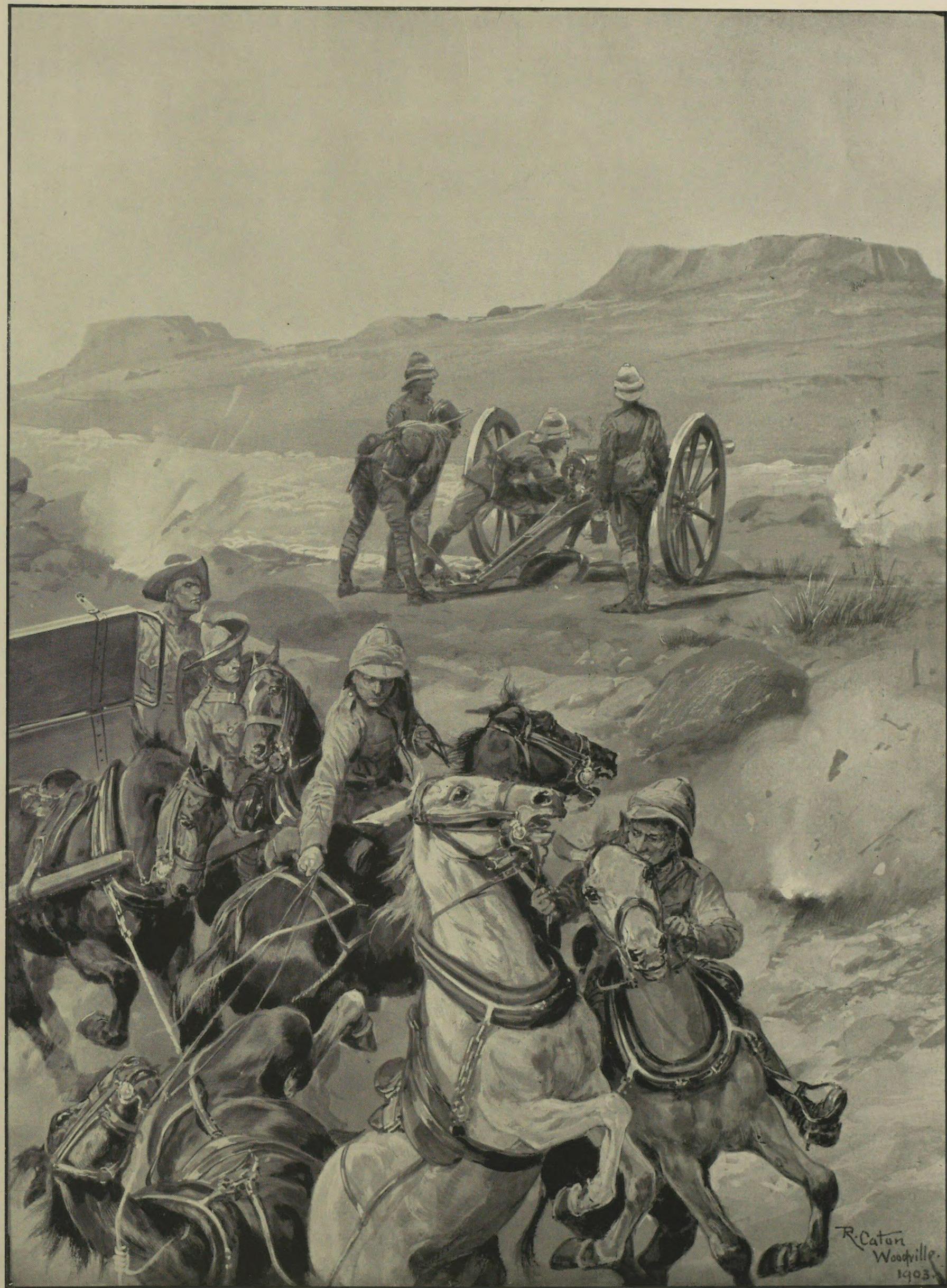
"I coughed up that dirt.

"'Hullo!' says a man walking beside me. 'You've spoke just in time. Have a drink?'

"I don't use rum as a rule, but I did then because I needed it.

"'What hit us?' I said.

"'Me,' he said. 'I got you fair on the hopper as you pulled out of that donga; but I'm sorry to say every last round in the hopper's exploded



I could have wept, Sir, at the spectacle of modern white men chained up to these old hand-power, back-number, flint-and-steel reaping machines.

and your gun's in a shocking state. I'm real sorry,' he says. 'I admire your gun, Sir.'

"Are you Captain Mankeltow?" I says.

"Yes," he says. "I presoom you're Mister Zigler. Your commanding officer told me about you."

"Have you gathered in old man Van Zyl?" I said.

"Commandant Van Zyl," he says very stiff, "was most unfortunately wounded, but I am glad to say not seriously. We hope he'll be able to dine with us to-night; and I feel sure," he says, "the General would be delighted to see you too, though he didn't expect," he says, "and no one else either, by Jove!" he says, and dried up like the British do when they're embarrassed. That's the word, ain't it?

molasses, "we've all admired your gun and the way you've worked it. Some of us betted you was a British deserter. I won a sovereign on that from a yeoman; and, by the way," he says, "you've disappointed me groom pretty bad."

"Where does your groom come in?" I said.

"Oh, he was the yeoman. He's a dam poor groom," says my Captain, "but he's a way-up barrister when he's at home. He's been running round the camp with his tongue out, waiting for the chance of defending you at the court-martial."

"What court-martial?" I says.

"On you as a deserter from the Artillery. You'd have had a good run for your money. Anyway, you'd never have been hung after the way



"Are you Captain Mankeltow?" I says.

"I saw him slide an Episcopalian prayer-book up his sleeve, and when I looked over the edge of the stretcher there was half a dozen enlisted men—privates—had just quit digging and was standing to attention by their spades. I guess he was right on the General not expecting me to dinner, but it was all of a piece with their sloppy British way of doing business. Any God's quantity of fuss and flubdub to bury a man, and not an ounce of preponedness in the whole outfit to find out whether he was rightly dead. And I am a Congregationalist anyway!"

"Well, Sir, that was my introduction to the British Army. I'd write a book about it if anyone would believe me. This Captain Mankeltow, Royal British Artillery, turned the Doctor on me (I could write another book about him) and fixed me up with a set of his own clothes and fed me on canned beef and biscuits and give me a cigar—a Henry Clay and a whiskey-and-sparklet. He was a white man."

"Ye—es, by Jove," he said, dragging out his words like a twist of

you worked your gun. Deserter ten times over," he says, "I'd have stuck out for shooting you like a gentleman."

"Well, Sir, right there it struck me at the pit of my stomach—sort of sickish, sweetish feeling—that my position needed regularising pretty bad. I ought to have been a naturalised burgher of a year's standing; but Ohio's my State, and I wouldn't have gone back on her for a desertful of Dutchmen. That and my enthusiasm as an inventor had led me to the existing crisis; but I couldn't expect this Captain Mankeltow to see it that way. There I sat, the rankest breed of unreconstructed American citizen, caught red-handed squirming hell at the British Army for months on end. I tell you, Sir, I wished I was in Cincinnatah that summer evening. I'd have compromised on Brooklyn."

"What d'you do about aliens?" I said, and the dirt I'd coughed up seemed to be back of my tongue again.

"Oh," says he, "we don't do much of anything. They're about

all the society we get. I'm a bit of a pro-Boer myself,' he says, 'but between you and me the average Boer ain't over and above intellectual. You're the first American we've met up with, but of course you're a burgher.'

"It was what I ought to have been if I'd had the sense of a common tick, but the way he strung it out made me mad.

"Of course I am not,' I says. 'Would *you* be a naturalised Boer?'

"I'm fighting against 'em,' he says, lighting a cigarette, 'but it's all a matter of opinion.'

"Well,' I says, 'you can hold any blame opinion you choose, but I'm a white man, and my present intention is to die that colour.'

"He laughed one of those big, thick-ended, British laughs that don't lead anywhere, and whacked up some sort of crazy compliment about America that made me mad all through.

"I am the captive of your bow and spear, Sir, but I do not understand the alleged British joke.

"I was introduced to five or six officers that evening, and every blame one of 'em grinned and asked me why I wasn't in the Filipeens suppressing our war! And that was British humour! They all had to get it off their chests before they'd talk sense. But they was sound on the Zigler. They all admired her. I made out a fairy story of me being wearied of the war and having pushed the gun at them these last three months in the hope they'd capture it and let me go home. That tickled 'em to death. They made me say it three times over, and laughed like kids each time. But half the British are kids; specially the older men. My Captain Mankeltow was less of it than the others. He talked about the Zigler like a lover, Sir, and I drew him diagrams of the hopper-feed and recoil cylinder in his note-book. He asked the one British question I was waiting for: 'Hadn't I made my working parts too light?' The British think weight's strength.

"At last—I'd been shy of opening the subject before—at last I said: 'Gentlemen, you're the unprejudiced tribunal I've been hunting after. I guess you ain't interested in any other gun-factory, and politics don't weigh with you. How did it feel your end of the game? What's my gun done, anyway?'

"I hate to disappoint you,' says Captain Mankeltow, 'because I know how you feel as an inventor.' I wasn't feeling like an inventor just then. I felt friendly, but the British haven't more tact than you can pick up with a fork.

"The honest truth,' he says, 'is that you've wounded about ten of us one way and another, killed two battery-horses and four mules, and—oh, yes,'

he said, 'you've bagged five Kaffirs. But, buck up,' he says, 'we've all had mighty close calls'—shaves, he called 'em, I remember. 'Look at my pants.'

"They was repaired right across the seat with Minneapolis flour-bagging. "I ain't bluffing,' he says. 'Get the hospital returns, Doc.'

"The Doctor gets 'em and reads 'em out under the proper dates. That Doctor alone was worth the price of admission.

"I was glad right through that I hadn't killed any of these cheerful kids; but I couldn't help thinking that a few more Kaffirs would have served me just as well for advertising purposes as white men. No, Sir. Anywhichway you regard the proposition, twenty-one casualties after months of close friendship like ours was—paltry.

"They gave me taffy about the gun—the British use taffy where we use sugar. It's cheaper, and gets there just the same. They sat round and proved to me that my gun was too good, too uniform—shot as close as a Männlicher rifle.

"Says one kid, chewing a bit of grass: 'I counted eight of your shells, Sir, burst in a radius of ten feet. All of 'em would have gone through one wagon-tile. It was beautiful,' he says. 'It was too good.'

"I shouldn't wonder if the boys weren't right. My Laughtite is too mathematically uniform in propelling power. Yes; she was too good for this refractory fool of a country. The training-gear was broke, too, and we had to swivel her around by the trail. But I'll build my next Zigler fifteen hundred pounds heavier. Might work in a motor under the axles—gasoline it 'ud have to be....

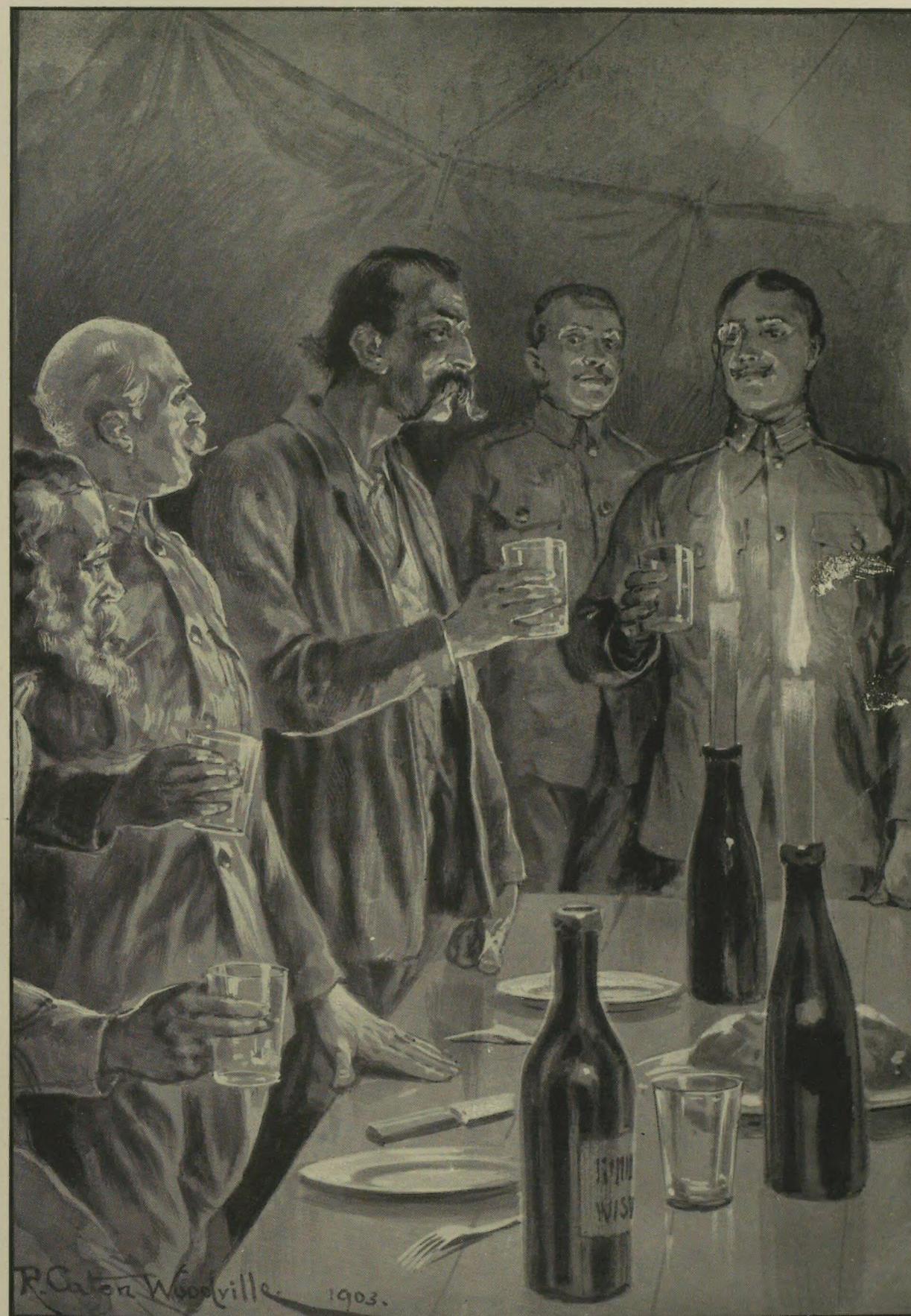
"Well, gentlemen,' I said, 'I'd hate to have been the death of any of you; and if a prisoner can deed away his property, I'd love to present the Captain here with what he's seen fit to leave of my Zigler.'

"Thanks awf'ly,' says my Captain. 'I'd like her very much. She'd look fine in the mess at Woolwich. That is, if you don't mind, Mr. Zigler.'

"Go ahead for all of me,' I says. 'I've come out of all the mess I've any use for, but she'll do to spread the light among the Royal British Artillery.'

"I tell you, Sir, there's not much of anything the matter with the Royal British Artillery. They're brainy men languishing under an effete system which, when you take good hold of it, is England—just all England. 'Times I'd feel I was talking with real live citizens, and times I'd feel I'd struck the Beef Eaters in the Tower.'

"How? Well, this way. I was tellin' my Captain Mankeltow what Van Zyl had said about the British being all Chamberlains when the old man saw him back from hospital three days ahead of time.



So they drank the King and Fox-hunting.

"Oh, dam it all!" he says, as serious as the Supreme Court. "It's too bad," he says. "Johanna must have misunderstood me, or else I've got the wrong Dutch word for these blarsted days of the week. I told her I'd be out on Friday. Oah, da-am it all!" he says. "I wouldn't have sold old Van Zyl a pup like that," he says. "I'll hunt him up and explain."

"He must have fixed it all right, for when we sailed over to the General's dinner, my Captain had Van Zyl about half-full of sherry and bitters, as happy as a clam. The boys all called him Adrian, and treated him like their prodigal father. He'd been hit on the collar-bone by a lump of something, and his arm was tied up.

on a star-route in Arkansas. I told him how I'd worked it up by instalments when I was a machinist in Waterbury, where the dollar watches come from. I told him I'd met Zalinski (he'd never heard of Zalinski!) when I was an extra clerk in the Navy Construction Bureau at Washington. I told him how my uncle, who was a truck-farmer in New Jersey (he loaned money on mortage too, for ten acres aren't enough in New Jersey), how he'd willed me a quarter of a million dollars, because I was the only one of our kin that called him down when he used to come home with a hard cider-jag on him and heave oxbows at his niece. I told him how I'd turned in every red cent on the



Was there anything wrong with the men who upset Van Bester's apple-cart last month, when he was trying to cross the line?

"But the General was the peach. I presume you're acquainted with the average run of British Generals, but he was my first. I sat on his left hand, and he talked like—like the *Ladies' Home Journal*. 'Y'ever read that paper? It's refined, Sir—and innocuous, and full of nickel-plated sentiments guaranteed to improve the mind. He was it. He began by a heart-to-heart about my health, and hoped the boys had done me well, and that I was enjoying my stay in their midst. Then he thanked me for the interesting and valuable lessons that I'd given his crowd—specially in the matter of placing artillery and rear-guard attacks. He'd wipe his long thin moustache between drinks—lime-juice and water he used—and blat off into a long 'a—aah,' and ladle out more taffy for me or old man Van Zyl on his right. I told him how I'd had my first Pisgah-sight of the principles of the Zigler when I was a fourth-class postmaster

Zigler, and the whole circus of my coming out with her, and so on, and so following; and every forty seconds he'd wipe his moustache and blat, 'How interesting. Reelly, now. How interesting.'

"It was like being in an old English book, Sir, like 'Bracebridge Hall.' But an American wrote that. I kept peeking round the corner for the Boar's Head and the Rosemary and Magna Charta and the cricket on the hearth and the rest of the outfit. Then Van Zyl whirled in. He was no ways jagged, but thawed—thawed, and among friends. They began discussing previous scraps all along the old man's beat—about sixty of 'em—as well as side-shows with other generals and columns. Van Zyl told 'im of a big beat he'd worked on a column a week or so before I'd joined him. He demonstrated his strategy with forks on the table.

"There!" says the General when he'd finished. "That proves my contention to the hilt. Maybe I'm a bit of a pro-Boer, but I stick to it," he says, "that under proper officers, with due regard to his race prejudices, the Boer 'ud make the finest mounted infantry in the Empire. Adrian," he says, "you're simply squandered on a cattle-run. You ought to be at the Staff College with De Wet."

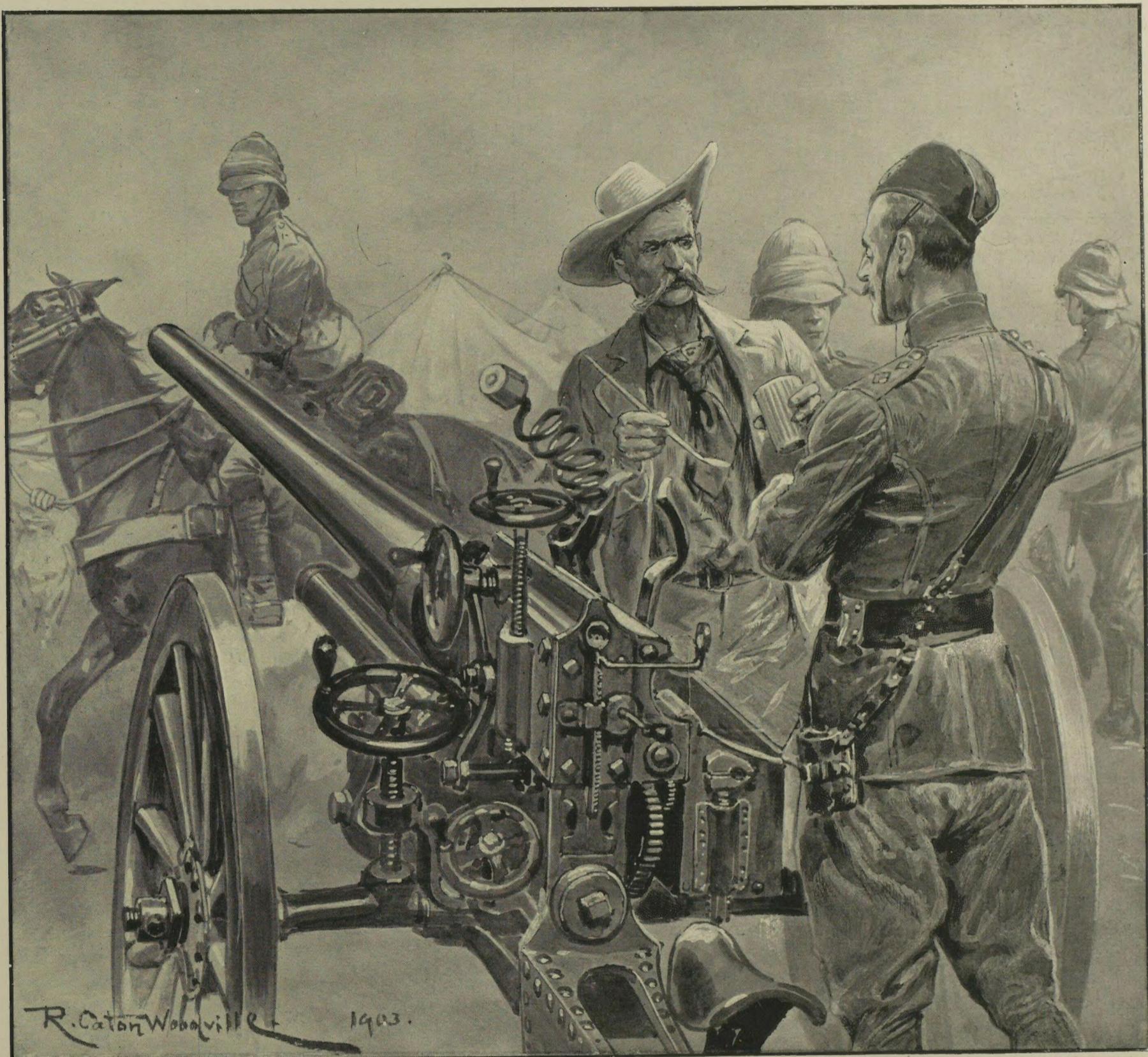
"You catch De Wet and I come to your Staff College — eh," says Adrian, laughing. "But you are so slow, General. Why are you so slow? For a month," he says, "you do so well and strong that we say we shall hands up and come back to our farms. Then you send to England and make us a present of two—three—six hundred young men, with rifles and

people are brimful of patriotism, but they've been born and brought up between houses, and England ain't big enough to train 'em—not if you expect to preserve."

"Preserve what?" I says. "England?"

"No. The game," he says; "and that reminds me, gentlemen we haven't drunk the King and Fox-hunting."

"So they drank the King and Fox-hunting. I drank the King because there's something about Edward that tickles me (he's so blame British); but I rather stood out on the Fox-hunting. I've rid after wolves in the cattle country and needed a drink pretty bad afterwards, but it never struck me as I ought to drink about it—hereditarily."



I stencilled her "Royal Artillery Mess, Woolwich," on the muzzle.

wagons and rum and tobacco and such a great lot of cartridges that our young men put their tails up and start all over again. If you hold an ox by the horn and hit him by the bottom he runs round and round. He never goes anywhere. So, too, this war goes round and round. You know that, General!"

"Quite right, Adrian," says the General; "but you must believe your Bible."

"Hooch!" says Adrian, and reaches for the whiskey. I've never known a Dutchman a professing Atheist, but some have been rather active Agnostics since the British sat down in Pretoria. Old man Van Zyl—he told me—had soured on religion after Bloemfontein surrendered. He was a Free Stater for one thing.

"He that believeth," says the General, "shall not make haste." That's in Isaiah. We believe we're going to win, and so we don't make haste. As far as I'm concerned I'd like this war to last another five years. We'd have an army then. It's just this way, Mr. Zigler," he says: "our

"No, as I was saying, Mr. Zigler," he goes on, "we have to train our men in the field to shoot and ride. I allow six months for it; but many column commanders—not that I ought to say a word against 'em, for they're the best fellows that ever stepped, and most of 'em are my dearest friends—seem to think that if they have men and horses and guns they can take tea with the Boers. It's generally the other way about, ain't it, Mr. Zigler?"

"So it is," I said.

"I'm so glad you agree with me," he says. "My command here I regard as a training dépôt, and you, if I may say so, have been one of my most efficient instructors. I mature my men slowly but thoroughly. First I put 'em in a town which is liable to be attacked by night, where they can attend riding-school in the day. Then I use 'em with a convoy, and last I put 'em into a column. It takes time," he says; "but I flatter myself that

any men who have worked under me are at least grounded in the rudiments of their professional career. Adrian, he says, 'was there anything wrong with the men who upset Van Bester's apple-cart last month, when he was trying to cross the line to join Piper with those horses he'd stole from Gabbitas?'

"No, General," says Van Zyl. "They got the horses back and eleven dead; and Van Besters, he ran to De la Rey in his shirt. They was very good, those men. They shoot hard."

"So pleased to hear you say so. I laid 'em down at the beginning of this century—a 1900 vintage. You remember 'em, Mankeltow?" he says.

'The Central Middlesex' Buncho Busters—clerks and floor-walkers mostly,' and he wiped his moustache. 'It was just the same with the Liverpool Buck-jumpers, but they were stevedores. Let's see—they were a last-century draft, weren't they? They did well after nine months. You know 'em, Van Zyl? You didn't get much change out of 'em at Potfontein?'

"No," says Van Zyl. "At Potfontein I lost my Andries."

"I beg your pardon, Commandant," says the General; and the rest of the crowd sort of cooed over Adrian.

"Excuse," says Adrian. "It was all right. They were good men those, but it is just what I say: some are so dam good we want to hands-up, and some are so dam bad, we say, 'Take the Vierkleur into Kaapstaad.' It is not upright of you, General. It is not upright of you at all. I do not think you ever wish this war to finish."

"It's a first-class dress-parade for Armageddon," says the General. "With luck, we ought to run half a million men through this mill. Why, we might even be able to give the native army a look in. Oh, not here, of course, Adrian, but down in the Colony—say a camp of exercise at Worcester. You mustn't be prejudiced, Adrian. I've commanded a district in India, and I give you my word the native troops were splendid men."

"Oh, I should not mind them at Worcester," says Adrian. "I would sell you forage for them at Worcester—yes, and Paarl and Stellenbosch; but Almighty!" he says, "must I stay with Cronje till you have taught half a million of these stupid boys to ride? I shall be an old man."

"Well, Sir, then and there they began arguing whether St. Helena would suit Adrian's health as well as some other places they knew about, and fixing up letters of introduction to Dukes and Lords of their acquaintance, so's Van Zyl should be well looked after. We own a fair-sized block of real

estate—America does—but it made me sickish to hear this crowd fluttering round the Atlas (oh yes, they had an atlas), and selecting stray continents for Adrian to drink coffee in. The old man allowed he didn't want to roost with Cronje, because one of Cronje's kin had jumped one of his farms after Paardeberg. I forget the rights of the case, but it was interesting. They decided on a place called Umballa, in India, because there was a first-class doctor there.

"So Adrian was fixed to drink the King and Fox-hunting, and study up the native army in India (I'd like to see 'em myself), till the British General had taught the male white citizens of Great Britain.

how to ride
Don't misunderstand
me, Sir. I loved
that General. After
ten minutes I loved
him, and I wanted
to laugh at him;
but at the same
time, sitting there
and hearing him
talk about the
centuries, I tell you, Sir,
it scared me. It
scared me cold!
He admitted every-
thing—he acknowledged the corn
before you spoke—
he was more
pleased to hear that
his men had been
used to wipe the
veldt with than I
was when I knocked
out Tom Reed's
two lead horses—
and he sat back and
blew smoke through
his nose and
matured his men
like cigars and
talked of the
centuries!

"I went to bed
nearer nervous
prostration than
I'd come in a
long time. Next
morning me and
Captain Mankeltow fixed up what
his shrapnel had
left of my Zigler
for transport to the
railroad. She went
in on her own
wheels, and I stencilled
her 'Royal
Artillery Mess,
Woolwich,' on the
muzzle; and he said
he'd be grateful if
I'd take charge of
her to Cape Town,
and hand her over
to a duck in the
Ordnance there.

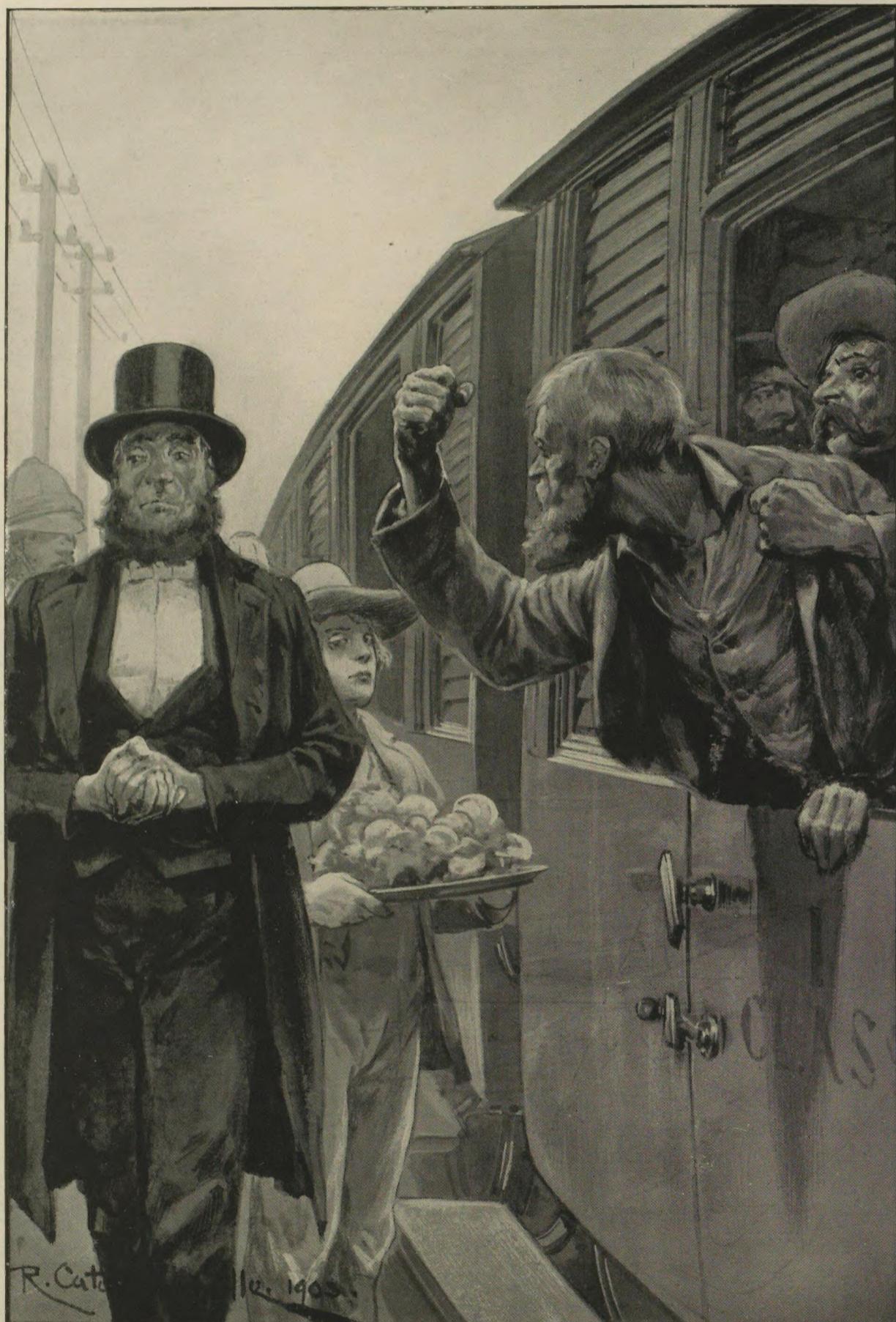
Then he said,

"How are you fixed financially? You'll need some money on the way home."

"For one thing, Cap," I said, "I'm not a poor man, and for another I'm not going home. I'm the captive of your bow and spear. I decline to resign office."

"Skittles!" he says (that was a pet word of his); "you'll take parole, and go back to America, and invent another Zigler a trifle heavier in the working parts—I would. We've got more prisoners than we know what to do with as it is," he says. "You'll only be an additional expense to me as a taxpayer. Think of Schedule D," he says, "and take parole."

"I don't know anything about your tariffs," I said; "but when I get to Cape Town I write home for money, and I turn in every cent my



"Keep your prayers for yourself," says Van Zyl.

board'll cost your country to any ten-century-old Department that's been ordained to take it since William the Conqueror came along.'

"But confound you for a thick-headed mule," he says; "this war ain't any more than just started! Do you mean to tell me you're going to play prisoner till it's over?"

"That's about the size of it," I says, "if an Englishman and an American could ever understand each other."

"But in Heaven's holy name why?" he says, sitting down of a heap.

"Well, Cap," I says, "I don't pretend to follow your ways of thought, and I can't see why you abuse your position to persecute a poor prisoner o' war on *his*."

"My dear fellow," he began, throwing up his hands and blushing, "I'll apologise."

"But if you insist," I says, "there are just one and a half things in this world I can't do. The odd half don't matter here; but taking parole, and going home, and being interviewed by the boys, and giving lectures on my single-handed campaign against the hereditary enemies of my beloved country happens to be the one. We'll let it go at that, Cap."

"But it'll bore you to death," he says. "The British are a heap more afraid of what they call being bored than of dying, I've noticed."

"I'll survive," I says; "I ain't English. I can think," I says.

"By God," he says, coming up to me, and extending the right hand of fellowship, "you ought to be English, Zigler!"

"It's no good getting mad at a compliment like that. The English all do it. They're a crazy breed. When they don't know you they freeze up tighter'n the St. Lawrence. When they do, they go out like an ice-jam

in April. Up till we prisoners left—four days—my Captain Mankeltow told me pretty much all about himself there was—his mother and sisters, and his bad brother that was a trooper in some Colonial corps, and how his father didn't get on with him, and—well, everything, as I've said. They're undomesticated, the British, compared with us. They talk about their own family affairs as if they belonged to someone else. Taint as if they hadn't any shame, but it sounds like it. I guess they talk out loud what we think, and we talk out loud what they think."

"I liked my Captain Mankeltow. I liked him as well as any man I'd ever struck. He was white. He gave me his silver drinking-flask, and I gave him the formula of my Laughtite. That's a hundred and fifty thousand dollars in his vest-pocket, on the lowest count, if he has the knowhow to use it. No, I didn't tell him the money-value. He was English. He'd know."

"Well, me and Adrian and a crowd of dam Dutchmen was sent down the road to Cape Town in first-class carriages under escort. (What did I think of your enlisted men? They are largely different from ours, Sir—very largely.) As I was saying, we slid down south, with Adrian looking out of the car-window and crying. Dutchmen cry mighty easy for a breed that fights as they do; but I never understood how a Dutchman could curse till we crossed into the Orange Free State Colony, and he lifted up his hand and cursed Steyn for a solid ten minutes. Then we got into the Colony, and the rebs—ministers mostly and schoolmasters—came round the cars with fruit and sympathy and texts. Van Zyl talked to 'em in Dutch, and one man, a big red-bearded minister, at Beaufort West, I remember, he jest wilted on the platform.

"Keep your prayers for yourself," says Van Zyl, throwing back a bunch of grapes. "You'll need 'em, and you'll need the fruit, too, when the war comes down here. You done it," he says. "You and your picayune church that's deader than Cronje's dead horses! What sort of a God have you been unloading on us, you black *aas vogels*? The British came, and we beat 'em," he says; "and you sat still and prayed. The British beat us, and you sat still," he says. "You told us to hang on, and we hung on, and our farms was burned, and you sat still—you and your God. See here," he says, "I shot my Bible full of bullets after Bloemfontein went, and you and God didn't say anything. Take it and pray over it before we Federals help the British to knock hell out of you!"

"Then I hauled him back into the car. I judged he'd had a fit. But life's curious—and sudden—and mixed. I hadn't any more use for a reb than Van Zyl, and I knew something of



He said England needed a Monroe Doctrine worse than America.

the lies they'd fed us up with from the Colony for a year and more. I told the minister to pull his freight out of that, and went on with my lunch, when another man come along and shook hands with Van Zyl. He'd known him at close range in the Kimberley siege and before. The old man was very well seen by his neighbours all around, I judge. As soon as this other man opened his mouth I said, "You're Kentucky, ain't you?" "I am," he says; "and what may you be?" I told him right off, for I was pleased to hear good United States in any man's mouth; but he whipped his hands behind him and said, "I'm not knowing any man that fights for a Tammany Dutchman. But I presoom you've been well paid, you dam gun-runnin' Yank."

"Well, Sir, I wasn't looking for that, and it near keeled me over, while old man Van Zyl started in to explain."

"Don't you waste your breath, Mister Van Zyl," he says. "I know this breed. The South's full of 'em." Then he spins around on me and says, "Look at here, you. A little thing like a King's neither here nor there, but what *you've* done," he says, "is to go back on the White Man in six places at once—two hemispheres and four continents—America, England, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. Don't open your head," he says. "You know right well if you'd been caught at this game in our country you'd have been jiggling in the bight of a lariat before you could reac'h for your naturalisation papers. Go on and prosper," he says, "and you'll fetch up by fighting for niggers same as the North did." And he threw me half-a-crown—English money.

"Sir, I do not regard the proposition in that light, but I guess I must have been sadly shook by the explosion. They told me at Cape Town my ribs was driven in on to my lungs. I am not adducing this as an excuse, but the cold God's truth of the matter is—the money on the floor did it. . . . I give up and cried—put my head down and cried.

"I dream about this still sometimes. He didn't know the circumstances, but I dream about it. And it's hell.

"How do you regard the proposition—as a brother? If you'd invented your own gun, and spent fifty-seven thousand dollars on her—and had paid your own expenses from the word 'go'? An American citizen has a right to choose his own side in an unpleasantness, and Van Zyl wasn't any Krugerite . . . and I'd risk my hide at my own expense. I got his address from Van Zyl; he was a mining man at Johannesburg, and I wrote him the facts. But he never answered. Guess he thought I lied. . . .

"Oh, say. Did I tell you my Captain gave me a letter to an English Lord in Cape Town, and he fixed things so's I could lie up apiece in his house? I was pretty sick, and threw up some blood from where the rib had gouged into the lung—here. He was a crank on quick-firing guns, and he took charge of the Zigler. He had his knife into the British system as much as any American. He said he wanted revolution, and not reform, in your Army. He said the British soldier had failed in every point except courage. He said England needed a Monroe Doctrine worse than America—a new doctrine, barring out all the Continent, and strictly devoting herself to developing her own colonies. He said he'd abolish half the Foreign Office, and take all the old hereditary families clean out of it, because, he said, they was expressly trained to fool around with Continental diplomats, and to despise the Colonies. His own family wasn't more than six hundred years old. He was a very brainy man, and a good citizen. We talked politics and inventions together when my lung let up on me.

"Did he know my General? Yes. He knew 'em all. Called 'em Teddie and Gussie and Willie. They was all of the very best, and all his dearest friends, but he told me confidentially they was none of 'em fit to command a column in the field. He said they were too fond of advertising. Generals don't seem very different from actors—or doctors or inventors.

"He fixed things for me lovely at Simonstown. Had the biggest sort of pull—even for a Lord. At first they treated me as a harmless lunatic, but after awhile I got 'em to let me keep some of their books. If I was left alone in the world with the British system of book-keeping, I'd reconstruct the whole British Empire—beginning with the Army. Yes, I'm one of their most trusted accountants, and I'm paid for it. As much as a dollar a day. I keep that. I've earned it; and I deduct it from the cost of my board. When the war's over I'm going to pay up the balance to the British Government. Yes, Sir, that's how I regard the proposition.

"Adrian? Oh, he left for Umballa four months back. He told me he was going to apply to join the National Scouts if the war didn't end in a year. 'Tisn't in nature for one Dutchman to shoot another, but if Adrian ever meets up with Steyn there'll be an exception to the rule. Ye-es, when the war's over it'll take half the British Army to protect Steyn from his fellow-patriots. But the war won't be over yet awhile. He that believeth don't hurry, as Isaiah says. The ministers and the school-teachers and the rebs 'll have a war all to themselves long after the north is quiet.

"I'm pleased with this country—it's big. Not so many folk on the ground as in America. There's a boom coming sure. I've talked it over with Adrian, and I guess I shall buy a farm somewhere near Bloemfontein and start in cattle-raising. It's big and peaceful—a ten-thousand-acre farm. I could go on inventing there, too. I'll sell my Zigler right out. I'll offer the patent rights to the British Government, and if they do the 'reelly-now-how-interesting' act over her I'll turn her over to Captain Mankeltow and his friend the Lord. They'll pretty quick find some Gussie or Teddie or Algie who can get her accepted in the proper quarters. I'm beginning to know my English.

"And now I'll go in swimming and read the papers after lunch. I haven't had such a good time since Willie died."

He pulled the blue shirt over his head as the bathers returned to their piles of clothing, and, speaking through the folds, added—

"But if you want to realise your assets, you should lease the whole proposition to America for ninety-nine years."





THE MOHOCK

BY H. B. MARRIOTT WATSON.

ILLUSTRATED BY A. FORESTIER.

CHAPTER I.
CONCERNING
MR. CLAVERDALE.

If anyone were anxious to write the complete history of Lady Merioneth, he would, no doubt, find material to his hand in many private letters in the collections of certain illustrious families, and also in the State archives of the time of George I. This story, however,

concerns that wayward intriguer merely as the unwitting instrument of Sir Rupert Valence's marriage.

Sir Rupert's manuscripts, compiled late in life and exhibiting but little form or order, contain a great deal of uninteresting small talk, gossip of Lady Merioneth, scandal of the Prince, and tittle-tattle as to Court favourites and political celebrities. Sir Rupert had no gift for writing; indeed, he rambles most discursively, and is as great a vagabond with his pen as he seems to have been in his life. Moreover, his sense of perspective was ridiculous, and matters which he appears to have considered of the first importance are often trivialities through which no sensible reader would take the trouble to labour his way; while, even if he should do so, he must perforce hold his nose sometimes for his stomach's sake. The Baronet's unblushing pages, however, may very well be called upon to contribute some items to a picture of the day, particularly to an episode in which he was intimately concerned, and which includes a portrait of that notorious Mohock, the Earl of Tiverton.

Sir Rupert Valence, of High Valence, was then but a boy of four-and-twenty, and had been in town only for a twelvemonth, in the space of which he had yet managed to see a good deal of high life, and to make a good many associates. Among those who had befriended the raw youth was Lady Merioneth, then at the zenith of her fame as a beauty. It was true that she had not a reputation wholly spotless, but she was a widow of some wealth, was known to be influential with Walpole and at Court, and never failed to command an attendance of people of fashion and importance at her routs and parties. Society was indulgent to the successful, and Lady Merioneth was undoubtedly that. It was in her house that the adventure which meant so much for Sir Rupert opened on a beautiful June evening.

"There was," says Sir Rupert in his memoirs, "a pack of people that hot night, that was unusual in such a house, and the stakes were high. Sir George Wilton lost more at Pharaoh in three hours' play than equalled three years of his rent-roll." Sir Rupert himself, being of an impetuous, reckless nature, lost heavily, and sought consolation and inspiration, maybe, in wine. At midnight he had also lost his temper, and, feeling somewhat stupid of head, retired in dudgeon from the card-room. This was not, however, quite of his own free-will, but was at the suggestion of Mr. Claverdale, who was of the party. Claverdale came round and whispered in his ear, which was the more friendly on his part as he himself had been winning, and yet was reluctant to win from so precipitate a loser. Sir Rupert left the table grudgingly, and as he was passing out his hostess greeted him.

"What! to bed so early, Sir Rupert?" said she mockingly.

"Madam," said he, "if 'twas to sit with your Ladyship, I would not to bed all night."

"Fie! we shall have you the prettiest tongue in town," said she, smiling. She admired the compliments of gallantry, though she had no particular fancy for Sir Rupert, who was young for her, and, moreover, too poor.

"Mr. Claverdale wins still?" she inquired.

"Mr. Claverdale wins still," said Lord Bygrave, who was seated by her. "He is lucky at cards and—"

But the lady rose with a little frown and made for the card-table at which Claverdale was seated. My Lord Bygrave gazed after her.

"Maybe he is willing to be lucky in love," he said, reflecting. "Yet, Sir Rupert, what know we all? And how much money has my Lady?"

"She must be rich," said Valence indifferently.

Lord Bygrave lifted his eyebrows humorously. "Mr. Claverdale is rich," he said. "Come, sit, Sir Rupert, and let us pull reputations in tatters. What! you will not? Why, youth is mighty mim-mouthing nowadays! Claverdale is your friend?"

"He has been monstrous civil to me, my Lord."

"Oh, come, we are all that to handsome youth. Maybe you shall find me a post in the Ministry some day. Here is some admirable port, Sir Rupert—a bottle my Lady has had fetched for me, remembering out of her special kindness my poor gout. Drink a glass with me, and pronounce your judgment. One must needs keep touch with youth somehow, and I like the judgment of youth on wine."

Sir Rupert somewhat moodily did as was suggested, although he had already taken as much wine as was good for him. Lord Bygrave was an interested spectator of events, and he had an insatiable curiosity. He looked at the card-table.

"She pursues him as a cat a mouse," he remarked. "Saw you that



smile? Why, I should feel uncomfortable did Lady Merioneth turn those eyes on me so. But, alas! my day is done."

He sipped his wine with a mock sigh, and regarded his morose companion.

"Know you what are Claverdale's sentiments?" he inquired.

Sir Rupert shook his head. "He says nothing of his own affairs. He is a very quiet man."

"Aye," said my Lord, nodding. "If rumour be true there is need he should be even quieter. 'Tis said he gets letters from Lord Bolingbroke in Paris."

There was about this statement a note of interrogation, but Sir Rupert was unable to answer it, even if he had been disposed to do so. It seemed he was not in Claverdale's confidence. Lord Bygrave turned his eyes again on the pale, still face of the latter. He was a man of thirty, of a thin delicate face, and with reticent eloquence written upon every feature. He came back to his companion, who had ceased to have any interest for him.

"Have you lost much?" he asked good-naturedly.

Sir Rupert confessed to a thousand guineas. Lord Bygrave yawned.

"Look at me," he said; "I am twice your age, and if I lose a hundred I call myself dotard and leave the table. Oh, youth, youth! Its capacities are commensurate inversely with its audacities."

He rose and limped away. Sir Rupert, feeling somewhat muddled and sleepy, left the room. He intended to leave the house, but a vague idea was in his head that he would wait till Claverdale had finished, for Claverdale never stayed late and had precise habits. He therefore went into an adjoining chamber which was lit with low lights, and sat down upon a couch in the recess of the window. Here he meditated unprofitably on his losses, and then, owing, as he explains, to Lord Bygrave's particular brand of port, he fell asleep.

He was awakened by the sound of voices, and, blinking in the faint light, endeavoured to remember where he was. No sooner was the recollection come to him, than he stood up, wondering how long he had slept, and feeling mortified for his offence against good manners. As he turned to leave the recess, the speakers emerged into view, and he saw them clearly. They were Lady Merioneth and a tall, good-looking man whom he had not seen before, and who certainly had not been of the party. Confusion descended on Sir Rupert, who stood bashfully, not knowing what course to take, and as he hesitated, the conversation reached his ears.

"There is no doubt that he has them," said the lady's voice in a low key. "And 'tis of importance that they should be secured."

"Faith!" said the man. "Let Sir Robert do his own work. Why do you vex your soul, my Lady?"

"My Lord," said she, tapping his arm with her charming air of caprice, "is't not enough that I wish it? You were not wont to ask and haggle."

"Claverdale is no friend of mine," answered my Lord in a bluff voice, "though we are connected by marriage. I have no fancy for his secret ways. Yet I would do no harm to him—"

"Nor I," she interrupted quickly. "I would save him. My Lord Tiverton, there is no question but Walpole knows of his treasonable correspondence with Bolingbroke and the Pretender. A descent may be made on his rooms any day. If you will secure the papers for me, it will save him."

"Why," said he, with a hard laugh, "he is a fortunate man."

"You mistake," she said imperiously. "I care not for him, save that he come to no harm."

"Why, then, do you wish the papers?" he asked bluntly; "and why do you use me as cat's paw?"

Again she tapped his arm, smiling pleasantly. "Sir Robert," said she, "should not be too omnipotent. It would be well if facts were in other hands than his."

He laughed carelessly. "You were ever an intriguer, my Lady," he said. "Well, you shall surely make me compensation."

"Maybe I shall make you Minister," she said lightly.

Lord Tiverton shrugged his shoulders. "I mean not that," he said, and gazed at her steadily. Her eyes fell. "Oh! there shall be some reward," she said with a sigh. "Yet, heavens, how you exact that which should be freely given!"

"I should wish it freely given," he said quickly.

"If I give, I give freely," she replied, and she looked very handsome and gracious.

Sir Rupert stood in misery in his corner. He knew not what to do. He dared not venture forth, having heard this curious conversation, and, at that moment of embarrassment, he had an uneasy doubt as to what it all portended. Claverdale was in treasonable correspondence with the Pretender, and Lady Merioneth wanted to get possession of the correspondence. What did it all mean?

While he considered, the others left the room, and their voices faded away. What was the hour? He glanced out of the window, but it was still dark. Evidently, therefore, he could not have slept long, and probably the card-party was still in progress. He resolved to make a bold movement and risk all. Yet, if he were seen quitting the house, and everyone else had gone, it would be humiliating to a gentleman with his pretensions to good form. He stole silently out of the door—and came face to face with Lady Merioneth.

She started back and drew a deep breath, while her teeth appeared like pearls upon the edge of her underlip. Her mouth was of that radiant colouring fabled by poets; and poets, indeed, of a kind had dedicated verses to it. Her lips were celebrated in private song as proud with disdain, tender, scornful, haughty, smiling, and Heaven knows what not. For the admirers of Lady Merioneth were numerous, and she had the knack of drawing the Muses to her house. Once she had even secured Dean Swift, but that evening ended disastrously. This seemed to promise disaster to poor Sir Rupert, who at twenty-four had not yet learned to

sustain an awkward situation with dignity and philosophy. His legs positively trembled, and he stammered forth that he had tarried long. Lady Merioneth let her eyes dwell on him tenderly, for her eyes also could be tender.

"You are not late, Sir Rupert," said she. "There is some still playing. Come, I am always glad of your company. You are as pretty as a girl, I declare."

This was not pleasant hearing for Sir Rupert, who prided himself on his manliness, but he was relieved that the danger was passing. Evidently Lady Merioneth had no suspicions where he had been and what he had heard.

She took his arm as cool as the white statue of Diana that adorned her hall, and brushed past the goddess on her way to the supper-room.

"Pray give me a glass of wine, Sir Rupert," says she, sinking in a chair. "I vow these creatures will weary me to the sepulchre. I must make ready my family vault, where lies Merioneth, rest him!—a good man and a bad husband. See these jewels, Sir Rupert!"

She raised her white arms, which gleamed like alabaster, and on her beautiful neck flashed a carcanet of diamonds.

"I have never admired diamonds so before," said he. "'Tis the setting that becomes them."

His look carried his admiration, for Lady Merioneth had an irresistible power.

"Said I not you had a tongue?" she said with a laugh, and crossed her small feet, elegantly negligent. Sir Rupert Valence thought her ravishing. Suddenly she bent over to him and whispered—

"Sir Rupert, heard you what I said to Lord Tiverton?"

"Yes, Madam," he stuttered, going red of face.

She nodded, her eyes bright, and sipped her wine. "I would I could enlist you also. There was you like a mouse in the room. Oh, fie, Sir Rupert. Lard, what might we not have been doing! Wretch!" She laughed as if in great good-humour.

"Madam," said he, still in confusion. "I may not pardon myself, seeing how deeply—"

"Oh, pooh!" said she; and used her fan on his knee. "You must help us. Mr. Claverdale is friend to you. I would I had thought of you ere this. Come, will you help?"

"My Lady," said he, in amazed confusion. "I—I know not. What would you have me do? You want some papers—"

"Know you how they called me in my birth, Sir Rupert?" she asked languishingly. "Charity I am named, and Charity I be. Is't not absurd? Charity I be to those that are my friends; and is not Claverdale, dear soul? He is rich as Croesus, and a fool, dear heart. But, rich as he be, he will fall and his head topple if Walpole gets his letters. Sir Rupert, will ye not serve a friend?"

"I would do aught to serve him," said Sir Rupert, in wonder.

"My Lord Tiverton will fail me," she said, after a pause. "See how frank I am with you. He is a forgetful, bluff man. But to-morrow night will you do it? He will not be persuaded. He is of a bitter obstinacy. You must steal, Sir Rupert, steal in the cause of honour and life, and fetch to me. Will ye do it?"

"I will," said Sir Rupert, carried out of himself by this fine lady's graciousness and beauty. She breathed her gratitude, and low lights were in her eyes. She was most admirable, and Sir Rupert wondered not that she was so much besought but that she was still a widow. You see, as he explains in his memoirs, "'Tis ill to look for wisdom in too young a lad, and the town cannot be learned by rote in a turn. I have known them that thought they might learn conduct and know their fellow creatures by lounging all day in the Mall," pursues the Baronet. "But the most that can be caught by such proceedings is the cut of the coat or the way a sword must hang." So Sir Rupert had not attained to his maturer experience of the feminine heart, and did not know Charity, Lady Merioneth.

That she showed no ill-temper in discovering she had been overheard was not remarkable now that he knew what she really wanted, and her frank appeal to him touched his vanity.

When he left the house it was still some time to dawn, and night had not yet begun to dissolve in the streets. The wind blew freshly out of the west across the Park and Mayfair fields, and struck pleasantly on Sir Rupert's hot face. Quality stifled behind closed windows, over guttering candles and in a press of painted and powdered company. This was Heaven's breath on the young man's face, although he would not have looked at it in that light. Indeed, he relates only that the wind was cool, and that he walked towards his rooms pondering the charms of Charity, Lady Merioneth, and the enterprise she had entrusted to him. Suddenly he was seized with vertigo, the vertigo of baffled and disappointed vanity. What if the Earl of Tiverton should anticipate him? What if his Lordship should make his attempt even to-night?

At the thought he swung round, and faced towards St. James's, where Claverdale lived in Ryder Street. He would see him, rouse him, and persuade him; and if so be Claverdale should prove a fool, he would fall back on his hands and his cunning. This resolution come to, Sir Rupert began to be mightily pleased with himself. He woke up again to new life and fresh vigour, and soon reached his friend's door. It was only



“What! to bed so early, Sir Rupert?” said she mockingly.

then that he hesitated for the first time. What sort of a welcome would he receive? Would he even be admitted at all?

The door was opened by Claverdale himself, fully dressed, and wearing a somewhat grave countenance. So soon as he recognised his visitor he stood aside, in the attitude of one who expects his friend to enter.

"You left early, Valence," said he; "I hope you are not come about that two hundred guineas. 'Twill wait. There is no need to addle your head over it. You played too hard, and should have ceased sooner."

Sir Rupert murmured that that was not his errand. "If I have not sufficient with me, I have plenty at my bankers. 'Twas something else. I wanted to talk with you."

Claverdale raised his eyebrows humorously. "Here is something unusual," he said drily. "Well, you shall drink your nightcap here and then go home. I can spare you but ten minutes, my good friend, for I am very sleepy."

Sir Rupert was no fool: indeed, he was an ingenious and intelligent young man, if a rash one. It occurred to him that if Claverdale was so sleepy, he might already have been abed. But he said nothing, and, entering, followed his host into the room. It was furnished with some austerity of taste and elegance unusual in those times of profusion. The chamber bore witness everywhere to French designs, and also to the wealth of its owner. Claverdale, with a gesture that was scarcely English, indicated a chair, into which young Sir Rupert plumped with a growing feeling of awkwardness.

"And now, my poor prodigal?" said Claverdale, with a smile that lighted up his severe features.

"I come to warn you, Claverdale," blurted forth Sir Rupert. "The Government knows of your correspondence with Bolingbroke."

CHAPTER II.

CYRENE.

CLAVERDALE continued to regard his friend steadfastly, the smile dying but slowly on his face. Yet die it did, and the countenance resumed its equanimity, as if it brooded far above the tangled traffic of the human world. When he spoke, it was with a ring of hardness in his voice.

"How know you that, Sir Rupert Valence of High Valence?"

Sir Rupert was embarrassed. He had forgotten that this question must follow, and Lady Merioneth's name trembled on his tongue. After all, what

harm would it do that Claverdale should know of her kindness? She had wished him to steal, and he would have stolen for her willingly; she had warned him, as he remembered, that to approach Claverdale would be futile. Yet, since he had chosen this way as the shortest to his aim, relying upon his influence with Claverdale, there was nothing for it but to be frank.

"Lady Merioneth bade me warn you," he said at last.

"Ah!" says Claverdale, and sat drumming his fingers on the table. "She is very kind," he proceeded. "Dear, how greatly kind is woman! She had the news from Sir Robert Walpole himself, I'll be bound. Their spies serve them well. Yes, Valence, I have treasonable letters in my possession. Walpole could send me to the block for them, I doubt not. So Charity Merioneth knows; my Lady warns me, does she? On my soul, I would give much to know why. She would have me destroy the letters, eh?"

"Yes," said Sir Rupert; and then, remembering that his commission had included a termination quite different, stammered, "At least—that is—"

Claverdale looked at him keenly. "Oh, there is more, friend?"

He smiled and put his hand to his cheek, rubbing it thoughtfully. "Valence, would you say I have looks?"

Sir Rupert stared at him in surprise. "Well enough," said he; "yet to my taste ye're too delicate, Ned."

Claverdale laughed aloud now. "Gad, I'm glad you're not a woman; or I might go begging kisses all my days. Well, there's some with better taste. And so Charity wants my letters," he added with a demure air of reflection.

Sir Rupert started. How had Claverdale guessed? "You're

a pretty cat's paw, Valence," he continued pleasantly. "Why, the sex will do what they will with you. You must learn resistance, lad, and equivocation. Why, ye've told me all there is to tell, save why my Lady wished to warn me. That puzzles me."

Sir Rupert did not like to say that Lady Merioneth had not asked him to warn his friend, merely to get possession of the documents. But he not unnaturally resented so cynical a patronage, and the assumption that he was ignorant of women.

"Damme, Mr. Claverdale," said he haughtily, "I am no chicken. You must know I am no schoolboy for your jeers. I have been in London Town a full year, and he that challenges my knowledge challenges me, Sir."

"Oh, your pardon," said Claverdale, with his graceful air. "I meant no reflections on a very gallant gentleman à la mode, Sir Rupert. Nay,



Sir Rupert stood in misery in his corner.

Valence, fly not out. Here is something to puzzle my wits. Why does my Lady warn me? Is she indeed so generous? Would she hope something from my gratitude?" He mused in a vacancy of mind, and next fell to humming a song—

"Oh, don't deceive me,
Pray do not leave me.
How can you use a poor maiden so?

Faith, Rupert, I'll not believe any widow could use a poor, unsmirched and innocent youth so. But hold up, lad; this news comes in time, opportune, pat to the hour. I thank you and my Lady. There was a post to-night from Bolingbroke. You see how I trust to my friend, Rupert Valence."

"Whom should you trust else, Claverdale?" said Sir Rupert, drawing himself up.

"Well," said the other, fingering a piece of paper which he had taken from his pocket, "I fear tongues. They move glibly, wagging like a bell-clapper, Valence, as does mine now. But you have brought me news, and I am grateful. Also, I am in no danger, for I go to France to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" echoed Sir Rupert.

"Aye, to-morrow. So you may send me those two hundred guineas, boy, to Paris, or send 'em not, as you will. I abandon Pharaoh for a more entertaining game, and one of higher stakes."

He rose as he spoke with his soft

smile and evident air of dismissal, which his friend could not misunderstand.

"My journey," said he, "is early; and so to bed. You look tired, Valence. You have a constitution like a nut, but 'twill crack if you continue in this way. Drink less wine, and more wisdom, and cut your pack at one of the morning, or two if it be a woman. Never watch the sun walk up the orient sky, as 'twill do presently. Even—"

He broke off sharply, and listened.

"What is that?" he asked. Sir Rupert turned his ears to the hall. Voices in a murmurous lull reached them; and then, of a sudden, resounded a thunderous clacking on the outer door.

Claverdale slipped quickly from the room, and Sir Rupert followed him. The blows on the door continued.

"Open! open, in the King's name!" cried a voice from without.

Claverdale looked at his friend under the swinging lamp with a significant expression.

"'Tis an hour too late," he said in a whisper. "Is this, then, why her Ladyship warned me? I shall yet die untimely."

"'Tis Walpole. You are to be seized," said Valence.

Claverdale nodded. He tore the paper which he still held in his hand in a dozen strips and then bit his lip.

"If it had been winter, Rupert!" he said, and turned towards the room again. A scared servant was descending the stairs with a candle. His master stopped him at the foot, and, taking the candle from him, set fire to the scraps of paper, dropping the ashes to the floor.

"I will be hanged if the Elector shall have me," he said between his teeth. "Clarke, stand by the door."

This was now beginning to yield under the blows that were raised from without. But Claverdale kept his wits.

"The papers! The papers!" cried Valence.

"Yes," said Claverdale, pulling his brows down. "There will be no time to destroy them at once; and they must not be taken on me. They lie in the jewel-case in the under-drawer in the bureau in my bedroom. Press inwards, Rupert, and escape with them while you can. I will hold them in parley here. There's more lives than mine hanging

on it. Escape, man, and meet me to-morrow. If not, burn 'em."

Sir Rupert sprang upstairs, and as he did so he heard Claverdale's voice quiet and low behind him. "Open the door, Clarke. These gentlemen take delay ill, and will leave us exposed to the winds of Heaven and the crows of the streets if we hesitate longer."

Darkness lay heavy in the stairway, and Sir Rupert was forced to conduct himself by the balustrade. He went without noise, so as to attract no attention from below, whence ascended now the sound of voices in conversation. If Claverdale could hold them in play for five minutes, he did not doubt his own capacity to get away with the compromising documents. He reached the landing on which he thought Claverdale's bed-room must be, and fumbled along the wall, searching for a handle. He found one and turned it. The door opened. A low light suffused the room, and against the panelled wall



The door was opened by Claverdale himself.

stood a curtained bedstead from which issued a tiny cry. Hastily Sir Rupert clapped-to the door again. It was the wrong room; possibly one of the maids slept there. He groped once more in the darkness and opened another door. This, at last, was surely Claverdale's.

The room was full of loosening darkness, and the objects in it were partly revealed by the two great windows. The tall bureau stood by one of these windows, and Sir Rupert made his way to it at once. He opened the lid with the key Claverdale had thrust into his hands, and rapidly felt for the drawer. Then he pressed inwards, and it gave. He drew it out, and in the vague light fished among the contents. His fingers suddenly met about a case. He had found it.

A thrill of triumph ran through him. He lifted the case, opened it, reached forth a clutch of papers, and even in the act was aware that someone had entered the room.

A misty twilight poured through the open window, irradiating the room greyly, and just within the threshold, come with soft footfall, he could make out the figure of a woman, still, tall, and wondering. Her dress was of dull pearl in the gloom, and she stood like a ghost, flickering in and out of darkness before his eyes with each breath he drew. Yet for all that silence and the uncertainty of the light, he was aware that she was there, and there flew through his mind the thought that here must be one of the maids of the house whom the noise had awoken. He remembered one by name, and now called to her in a low voice.

"Is't Sally?"

"No, 'tis not Sally," answered out of the environing twilight a soft, flowing voice. "'Tis I—'tis Cyrene."

As she spoke she emerged into the room. Sir

Rupert drew aside the curtains of the window so that the dawn was visible, sheer away over the tops of the houses, and the two were face to face, and could make out each other's features. He noticed that a little trembling ran down her slender body. Then he spoke.

"I am sent on an errand by Mr. Claverdale," said he, with some visible embarrassment.

Her eyes dropped to the box he held and to the papers in his hand, and she gave vent to a little cry, which was instantly hushed. Sir Rupert made her out for a lady, but what she did there puzzled him. It seemed that she was young; and she suspected him. How was he to allay her suspicions without revealing Claverdale's secret? It was quite certain that she was no servant. She might be anybody, for he knew not who also lodged in the house.

"You are here to fetch Mr. Claverdale's papers?" she inquired in her

soft and tremulous tones; and then, on a bolder note, "Pray, who are you, Sir?"

"I am Sir Rupert Valence, Madam," said he.

"Sir Rupert Valence!" she echoed vaguely, and seemed to consider.

But Sir Rupert was uncomfortably conscious of the passing moments, and of the Government agents below. He had no time to lose. He moved a step towards the door, but it seemed that to reach it he must dodge past her, and he hesitated. The light was discovering her to him.

"'Tis a strange thing, you will confess, Sir," said the girl at last, with a little awkward laugh. "'Tis a strange errand, a stranger past midnight with

Mr. Claverdale's private papers."

"'Tis not so strange, Madam," said he quickly, "as that a strange woman should question my right at dead of night. Pray, Madam, what name do you honour?"

She was silent for another space, and he could now make out her form. Doubt rose in her handsome eyes, which were at once bewildered and fearful; her bosom fluttered, and the pallor of her cheeks was visible. She laughed tremulously.

"Ah, Sir," she cried. "'Tis as much your right as mine to demand: I am Cyrene Pomeroy, my brother's sister. 'Twas but natural of me to stand guard over his letters. I beg you pardon my inquisitive tongue, Sir Rupert."

"Nay, Madam," he

answered, with stumbling words; "'twas a proper suspicion you had of me. You know me not, and—and I—"

"Of course, knew me not," she answered, with her forced laugh. "I am half-sister to Mr. Claverdale, and am in town to stay with him."

"Why, then," said Sir Rupert very cheerfully, "I am glad to hear it, for you may further my plot, which is to save him."

"Save him!" she echoed, glancing involuntarily at the papers he held.

"Madam," said Sir Rupert eagerly; "these papers are of grave import; they spell much, and that hazardous, to Mr. Claverdale. And the Government agents are now in this house to seize them. There is no time to be lost. I must get them away."

"You must get them away, Sir—of that there is no doubt," she answered slowly. She passed lightly out of the room and listened at the well of the stairs. There streamed up the sound of voices, now loud and dissonant. Cyrene ran back. "You must forgive me, Sir Rupert," she said with a little heartlessness, "that I did not spy your quality sooner; yet 'twas the darkness. But pray let me spare you that labour. I will take the papers myself in charge for my brother."

Sir Rupert hesitated for the space of ten seconds. It still remained that he did not know this girl, who said she was Claverdale's half-sister. What if she were not?

"In truth, Madam," said he very politely, "you do me an injustice to suppose the charge is a labour. Besides, I am under instructions from Mr. Claverdale."



Sir Rupert drew aside the curtains of the window.

"True," said she, after a perceptible pause, and with an appearance of great frankness. "Do as you will; you are right to hold to your duty."

"Then, by your leave, Madam, I will take mine," said Sir Rupert gallantly, for he was growing restive under this detention, despite the

so friendly an air. As they reached the hall the noise of voices broke out more clamorously, and the girl turned and looked apprehensively at her companion.

"You are right," she whispered; "I am sure they mean no good to my brother."

At that moment the door of the room on the right opened stormily and



fire of her fine eyes, as he describes it.

"Nay, but we will descend together by yours, Sir Rupert," she returned, with a pretty coquettish glance that thrilled him; and she passed out before him.

Sir Rupert confesses that he was struck with her elegant looks; she was no young miss at nurse, but a handsome woman of the mode, though with a better colour than the dames of town. But he had little time to use his eyes on her, as, above all, he was anxious to get away with the dangerous papers. He held them hard; his arm unobtrusively dropped by his side as he came down the stairs behind Cyrene Pomeroi into the square and roomy hall. He was certain that she was now convinced that his mission was genuine. She had

Down went Mr. Wellingtons under a heavy blow.

some figures emerged.

There was no light in

the hall save that which

struck in from the vacant and forlorn

dawn without, but the opened door

disclosed a candelabrum beyond. The

rays from this fell upon Claverdale, pale

and possessed, but with a vehement

passion controlled on his features.

They fell, too, on another face, and the recognition of this startled Sir Rupert. It was the Earl of Tiverton, surely. Simultaneously, he felt his companion wince and shrink, for they were both against the wall, into the darkness of which they had unconsciously retreated. Sir Rupert wondered what was the significance of Lord Tiverton's presence there. Had it been a mistake? But Claverdale's flashing eye spoke for the situation. What

did it mean? At least, it seemed as necessary as ever that he should get outside the house with the papers, and to do that he must not be seen now. He remained in the gloom where he was. Was it treachery? He saw Lord Tiverton begin the ascent of the stairs and one of the other gentlemen tipsily sang a stave. He became aware suddenly of a faint clicking sound somewhere near, and was aware that the girl was no longer by him. Was it possible that the door into the street was open? A little thread of light appeared on the wall opposite and grew gradually. Whence came it? He waited, looking for the intruders to follow Lord Tiverton upstairs; but one remained, and it was not he that was tipsy.

"I shall hold each and several of you responsible for this, Mr. Guildford Wellings," he heard Claverdale say in his icy manner.

"Gad, Sir; delighted, Sir," said Mr. Guildford Wellings, with an elaborate bow. "Tivvy will claim first place; but, damme, Mr. Claverdale, set me before Clement! damme, you must!" Sir Rupert resolved on action. It was clear these nocturnal visitors were bent on stealing by violence what he had already taken; and if he could not surprise this Wellings he was not worth his manhood. He drew himself up for a rush. . . .

Suddenly the papers were twitched with a swift movement from his fingers. He turned with an oath, and stared. The door shot wide gently, and he saw the girl's figure slipping forth. She had robbed him! The lock clicked in the catch. She was gone.

Sir Rupert leapt across the hall and pulled at the heavy door, and by this act drew the attention of Mr. Guildford Wellings, who ran forward towards him. There was little time for reflection. Down went Mr. Wellings under a heavy blow from the young Baronet, and in another moment Claverdale had joined his friend.

"Run, run—hasten, Rupert! Zounds, you're a good fellow!" and, unlatching the door, he pushed his friend into the street. Sir Rupert, unable to explain and unwilling to lose valuable time, dashed down the steps and into the breaking day.

Out of the dimness rumbled the noise of a departing coach, possibly one of those that had been in waiting for my Lord Tiverton. Sir Rupert took to his heels in the direction of the sound forthwith. He had been completely deceived by a paltry girl who was possibly in league with the raiders, or, if not, was at least a spy of the Ministry. As he reflected on this explanation, which appeared positive, his vanity was mortified and his anger rose.

The night was fine, and the wind still streamed in the dark channels of the streets, bringing to him now and then news of the coach in front; yet it was obvious that he could not by any means overtake on foot what rolled upon wheels, and he must have given up in despair and fury of mind as the breath left his body, but that at the corner of St. Martin's Lane a heavy chaise lumbered into sight. He hailed it, panting, and was soon being driven northwards through Soho as fast as the tired horse could carry him. Thus they fled, pursuer and pursued, towards St. Giles's, out upon the turnpike by Tottenham Court, through the village of Kentish Town, and farther still towards the heights of Hampstead. It was a race of coach against coach,

and now the one flagged, and now the other, and now the distance between them diminished, and anon it drew out again.

Unhappily, Sir Rupert's vehicle was of a clumsier and heavier build than the light carriage before him, which he could sometimes see and always hear, rushing through the grey of the dawn with all speed over the ill-paved and rutty roads. But between his teeth he vowed that she should not escape him, and should confess herself for jade in penitence. He would humble this precious spy who had tricked him so, handsome though she was. Therefore the driver, stimulated by the promise of reward, whipped up his horse and vainly endeavoured to come abreast of the runaway. Presently, just as they were mounting the slopes of the Heath, every sign and token of the other coach had vanished, and it seemed that Sir Rupert's chance was gone for ever, and the unlucky papers in the hands of Claverdale's enemies.

With these discomposing reflections in his mind, Sir Rupert was savagely ascending the hill, when he was aware of an outcry on the still air, and the report of a pistol. Once more the coachman was induced to ply his whip, and the weary horse ambled weakly up the slope in the direction of these sounds. The Heath lay wide and black and solitary, giving ear to the silent night and the quiet stars; and it seemed as if these two spectators, heaven and the broad-bosomed earth, were still to listen to this sudden outbreak of noises. Against the feeble lights of the dawn, as he came up, Sir Rupert could descry the body of a coach, a struggling figure upon the box, and a man on horseback, blurred and monstrous to the eye. There was no doubt what was forward, and, leaping from his seat, he drew his sword as he sped towards the party.

The highwayman turned about on hearing his approach, and gave him the compliment of a pistol-shot, which grazed his cheek, singed through his curls, and went out by his hat. The next moment the fellow had struck the spurs into his horse, and, with a harsh laugh of derision, was galloping

ing across the broken ground of the Heath. Sir Rupert breathlessly reached the carriage, and, perceiving its occupant to be a lady, took off his hat.

"Madam, I fear I come too late," said he.

"Sir, you are welcome that you come at all," she cried in distress. "I have lost that which—" But here she broke off suddenly, as Sir Rupert by a movement took the light. She uttered an exclamation, and Sir Rupert too cried out in astonishment. It was Cyrene Pomeroy.

Her face was white and grave, and there was a look of anger rising in her eyes.

"I owe you thanks," said she, "that you have saved my purse, Sir, and the bitterest hate that—" But here again she broke off, only continuing to regard him with indignation.

"Madam, I am proud to have had the honour to serve you ever so slightly," Sir Rupert declared coldly. "Yet I am not here in chase of a tobyman, but of a thief."

"A thief!" she echoed angrily. "You use strange terms to my brother's sister, you who have professed to be friend to him."



The highwayman gave him the compliment of a pistol-shot.

"I know not who you be," said Sir Rupert, his young blood hot; "but, whosoever you be, you have stolen papers from me."

"Faith, were they yours?" she asked with cold sarcasm.

"I was entrusted with them," said Sir Rupert, "to preserve them from such as you, Madam, and your friends."

"I do not understand you, Sir," she answered, with a little frown on her beautiful face. "This talk is all abracadabra. You make pretences."

"Madam, nothing so plausible as a spy!"

"A spy!" she exclaimed, the colour in her face now. "By Heaven, I declare I would I endured the highwayman rather than this fellow."

"Enough, Madam," said Sir Rupert. "If I have had the honour to rescue you, as you allege, and that privilege, you shall return me my property, and we will cry quits."

He put out a hand as he spoke. She laughed a scornful, angry little laugh. "I thank you for your timely aid, Sir," she said; "and pray you will be so good as to ask the coachman to drive on. It wears to morning."

"'Tis true," she gasped. "My poor brother's ruined through his folly and your wickedness."

"My wickedness!" he echoed wonderingly. "Why, 'tis I that have tried to save him whom you style your brother!"

"What!" she cried, "you who are in league with my Lord Tiverton and his enemies!"

Sir Rupert fell back a step in amazement.

"I in league with Lord Tiverton?" he said. "Why, I never set eyes on him before last night! 'Twas to warn Mr. Claverdale of a raid that would be made on him that I went to his rooms. How Lord Tiverton comes into this matter I know not. At least—" he hesitated, because he realised suddenly that he did know, but that he did not know how things had fallen out just as they had. A change had come over the girl's face.

"You say you are my brother's friend?" she asked quickly.

"I have involved myself in peril to help him," he said simply.



He assisted Miss Pomeroy into the coach with ceremony.

"Pardon me," said Sir Rupert, laying a hand on the chaise. "There is something that I must require of you."

"Are you turned 'wayman as well as cracksman, then?" she asked bitterly.

"Madam," said he, stubbornly polite, "I will insist on my right to regain what I have lost."

"You would use force?" she asked quickly.

"I am a man, Madam, and you are a woman. Pray, shame me not before myself," he answered, his heart throbbing with his mingled emotions.

Miss Pomeroy set her teeth.

"Well, I beg you to begin," she cried audaciously.

Sir Rupert was taken aback, for he had expected a surrender, and this handsome vixen promised fight.

"Madam," he stammered, "I am loth to use such measures on one—"

"Pray, Sir, to business," she interrupted with scorn and anger. His glance took in the elegance of her dress and her moving bosom. There was something in her eye that daunted him, whatever she was. She clenched her little hand tight and held it to her breast. It seemed monstrous to offer violence to one so young and beautiful.

"Madam," he said, "you know that those papers you have are important; that upon them hangs the life of Mr. Claverdale—nay, and the lives of others."

"I have not been in town this year," she said, in a lower voice. "I only arrived this week. If 'tis true—"

"Madam, my honour!" said Sir Rupert.

A long sigh escaped the girl.

"We have been at cross purposes," she said sadly, descending from the coach and approaching him. "I took you for one who would do my brother harm."

"And I you," he said with a smile, as the truth dawned on him, "who would do likewise. But, Madam, if you are such as you say, let us join forces and destroy the wretched documents. 'Twill be wiser."

Cyrene Pomeroy started. "'Tis impossible," she said.

"Madam," he said, "the packet—"

She was white now again, all her anger fled, and only alarm on her face. "I have it not," she said tremulously. "'Tis gone."

"What, Madam?" he cried, suspicion once more awakening.

"Nay, 'tis true I ran off with them, thinking you were to betray my brother. But you come too late. You said right. The highwayman—"

"He has them! The Devil! This is worse and worse," exclaimed Sir Rupert in dismay, and the two stared at each other disconsolately.

CHAPTER III.

THE SIGN OF THE PACKHORSE.

THE Heath was now bathed in light, and shadows were jumping shyly from every tree and bush. Cyrene Pomeroy suddenly uttered an exclamation of pain, and a sob sprang into her throat.

"'Tis my stupidity," she cried. "Oh, I have destroyed him!"

"Nay, Madam," said Sir Rupert chivalrously; "I will not have you blame yourself. 'Twas but just and right to outwit such a thief as I appeared."

"If I had known—" began Miss Pomeroy.

"Nay, I beg of you," he stammered, interrupting her. "'Twas my fault not to have been more explicit."

"Oh, had I but slept on, and not been awakened by you—" she began again.

"Awakened by me?" said Sir Rupert in surprise. Their glances met, and Cyrene's delicate cheeks were charged with faint colour.

"'Twas your room, then?" he stammered.

"I think," said Miss Pomeroy hastily, "that 'tis time we pursued the highwayman."

Sir Rupert frowned.

"He has a long start of us," he said; "and Heaven knows which way he took; but I swear, by my faith, I will follow him to the end, even if it be to Tyburn." This he said very bravely, being, as he acknowledges, moved by the distress and beauty of his companion.

"I will help you," said she eagerly.

He looked at her doubtfully, for, much as he would have liked such company, he feared that she would prove only an encumbrance. But the Heath was wide, and day was breaking on them; and he had not the remotest notion in which direction to seek the villain. He turned and looked at his chaise, where, in the distance, the poor rag of a horse was blowing and steaming. Then his gaze came back to Cyrene and her coach.

"If I might borrow your coach," he began hesitatingly.

"'Tis not mine," said she; "I know not to whom it belongs. But I bought it for a price—there was no time to lose—at least, I thought not."

"Maybe 'tis my Lord Tiverton's," said Sir Rupert suddenly, realising that there were mysteries as yet unsolved in this nocturnal adventure.

"Indeed, I hope it is," she cried with spirit; "for 'tis through him that we are in this case."

"What can he have meant? What was intended against Mr. Claverdale?" inquired the bewildered Sir Rupert.

"I know not," said Miss Pomeroy, with a sigh. "But that 'twas evil intended is manifest, for the Earl of Tiverton would not be involved otherwise. His fame is bruited about for his extravagances. He will do everything violent. Oh! he is detestable: Yet maybe it was but of a piece with his arrogant bullying ways, for he could not have known of the papers. 'Tis all a perplexity—'tis all a misunderstanding," she cried.

"Nay, my Lord knew very well," said Sir Rupert quickly.

"How so?" she asked, as quick as he.

Sir Rupert shook his head. "I cannot see daylight," he avowed, "yet this is certain, that my Lady Merioneth instructed the Earl of Tiverton to seize the papers."

"Lady Merioneth," she echoed.

"Yes, so as to save your brother from his own follies," she said.

Miss Pomeroy went off into angry laughter.

"Why, 'tis she that is his most dangerous enemy, being a woman and slighted by him. She hath manœuvred to catch him, the wretch, this twelve-month. Oh, Sir Rupert, I see it all now! My Lady Charity begs my Lord of his kindness to save poor Claverdale from himself, and my Lord generously consents for a consideration. Oh, fie! oh, fie! I see it clearly. But where came you in, Sir Rupert? How gets this to your ears?"

Sir Rupert owned to feeling somewhat uncomfortable. He grew red, he opened his mouth, but spoke not, and he shifted restlessly.

"I overheard the conversation, Madam," he said at last.

Miss Pomeroy was regarding him seriously with her frank and courageous eyes.

"And flew to warn your friend?" she said with a little touch of sarcasm.

"On my soul, 'twas so," he protested. "I was deceived by the lady, I will confess, though at my age I should ha' known better."

A smile flitted over Miss Pomeroy's features.

"But if I misread her intentions I was fortunately not led into the trap. Off goes I pell-mell to Claverdale, and not a moment too soon, if what you say be true; for Lord Tiverton and his bullies tumble in after me."

"Sir Rupert," said the girl, putting out her hand impulsively, "you have saved my brother from—a wicked woman, and you will have saved him from himself if we can catch this highwayman."

"Command me, Madam," said he with equal impulsiveness; "may I perish if I leave the chase this side of God's acre."

As he spoke he gave orders to the drivers, one of whom he dismissed, and then he assisted Miss Pomeroy into the coach with ceremony.

"We will drive to the nearest inn," said he, "where you shall obtain refreshment. You must be weary and ahungred."

"I am both," said she; "but I will neither eat nor rest till I have seen where this ends."

"Nor I," says Sir Rupert heartily; who, however, made a mental reservation in favour of drinking, for his head was very hot and his palate was dry, which, of course, is the penalty of a sleepless night. The coach rumbled up the hill and descended towards lights in a little nook of the lower Heath.

It was a patch of wood growing in a tiny vale, and secreted, as it were, by the environing heights; and in the thick of the tall summer trees, that waved in the wonderful morning breezes, was a small and ancient tavern. In pursuance of his reservation, Sir Rupert ordered the coachman to pull up here, and knocked on the door to ask for news of the highwayman. Of course it was always possible that the people of the inn had been asleep at that early hour, and had seen nothing—in which case he might take the opportunity to drink a glass of rum and-milk, or a decent draught of wine, if it were procurable, or even a tankard of ale. To the knocking came the host, shambling in slippers, and peered angrily out at this untimely visitor. But Sir Rupert's air and voice of authority reduced him to a proper respectfulness, and he confessed that he had woken in a bad temper owing to a previous disturbance.

"A man, Sir, that rapped at my house, and blasphemed, and swore that he would pull it down did I not descend."

"Heavens, 'tis my quarry!" cried Sir Rupert in a great state of excitement, and, forgetting his thirst, back he runs to the coach to acquaint Miss Pomeroy. This news threw the lady also into a condition of expectancy, and even agitation. She begged that he would make every exact inquiry as to the direction in which the ruffian had fled. Sir Rupert returned to the tavern and questioned the man. The insolent visitor had been a tall, burly fellow. He could swear to that, for, being afraid of the threats, he had descended and supplied him; which, as his honour would understand, was his excuse for his ill-temper on his second awakening. Moreover, the man was gone in liquor, and sang loudly some abominable tune, and the last the innkeeper saw or heard of him was the loom of his black horse and the rattle of hoofs passing down the valley.

"By the Lord," said Sir Rupert, "'tis he—black horse!"

This time, however, he remembered his thirst, and drank a tankard of ale before returning to Miss Pomeroy.

When they were again upon the way, Sir Rupert, who was more himself now, faced the situation boldly. He was quite quick of wit, as may have appeared, and he saw that although, so far, fate or accident had favoured them, they could not drive on indefinitely on a wild chase after an unknown man who would, in all probability, vanish into the country that was opening before them in the dawn, as a rabbit into a warren.

"We will pull up at the next place where any is astir and inquire again," said he to Miss Pomeroy.

They passed one or two solitary farms, and presently turned a corner of the highway which revealed another tavern—a little rustic hostelry, before which swung a sign and in the open door of which a maid was using a broom. Two or three horses were tethered to the railing about a tree before the inn. The sign of the Packhorse creaked to-and-fro as Sir Rupert alighted from the coach, and immediately the coachman hailed him. The man declared that he could go no farther, as his horse was spent, and begged to be allowed to return. He would bait here and go back to Hampstead with what speed was left in the poor creature. Sir Rupert reflected. It was more than a nuisance; it meant the cessation of pursuit. He argued with the fellow, who was obstinate and surly.

"You are this lady's coachman," he said angrily.

"I am not," said the driver stubbornly. "I was hired by three gentlemen to carry them to a house, and the lady came out and offered me more."

"Well, go to the Devil!" exclaimed the irritable Baronet; and, having explained the situation to the girl, he assisted her to the ground, and they entered the inn. There was a considerable noise within, and, placing Miss Pomeroy in a private room off the passage, he set out to find the innkeeper and make inquiries. He had also to endeavour to obtain horses and a chaise for the continuation of their quest. The first man he encountered had an official air about him, and scrutinised Sir Rupert with almost suspicious eyes; but immediately afterwards saluted very civilly.

"Can you say where the host is, my good man?" inquired the Baronet in his haughty tones.

The man indicated a door, opening which Sir Rupert found himself in the presence of a party. There were three fellows in the unmistakable dress of officers of the law, there was the landlord bubbling over with excitement, and there was a fifth man, seated on the wooden bench, handcuffed and guarded. Sir Rupert's exclamation of wonder rang through the room and drew the attention of the company. It was the highwayman, or he was double Dutch!

The innkeeper, who was busily engaged in serving his guests, among whom was the prisoner, hustled up to him. Surely an insignificant wayside tavern had never begun the day so early or so well!

"Your orders, Sir?" said he, with respectful triumph in his voice.

"Who is that man?" demanded Sir Rupert, pointing a finger at the prisoner.



Miss Pomeroy went forward and looked at the spoil.

"Jack Niven, your honour," said the innkeeper glibly, as if afraid lest anyone should forestall him; "Jack Niven, the famous 'wayman, the best practitioner at the high toby these twenty years."

"High toby!" said Sir Rupert, and suppressed what was on his lips, for he was sometimes a cautious young man.

"What's the charge?"

"Holding and robbing one Anthony Merrill on Finchley Common last Tuesday night," said one of the constables that sat by the prisoner, a man with fat, puffy cheeks, who appeared to be out of wind.

The highwayman grinned and raised the glass he held to his mouth.

"You wouldn't ha' took me, Hilditch, if I hadn't been in liquor," said he blandly, and stared with his smile at Sir Rupert. The latter vaguely felt that there was something mocking in the glance. Now he was considering what he should do, for his course did not appear very clear to him, when he heard an exclamation at the door behind him, and Miss Pomeroy's voice cried out excitedly—

"'Tis he! That's he that robbed me of them!"

Sir Rupert turned with a little frown. She was certainly injudicious, for whatever the highwayman had taken from her was assuredly now in the possession of the constables. Hilditch, the fat man, looked at her with an expression of interest.

"What, will you charge him too, Madam?" he asked.

"More of your work, Jack. This should take you a double journey to Tyburn," remarked another of the constables affably.

The highwayman, with his smile, still looked at Sir Rupert and the lady.

"I have not laid a hand on 'em, so help me!" said he.

Was it a mocking smile?

"What was't he took from you, Madam?" asked Hilditch importantly.

"Why—" began Miss Pomeroy; but Sir Rupert's hand stole out behind him, and seized hers with a warning squeeze. It lingered there.

"This lady was attacked by that man," he said, "on Hampstead Heath an hour since, and had it not been for my coming up would have been robbed of all she possessed. As it was she lost a jewel—"

"There was a jewel on him," said Hilditch. "Ten guineas, a diamond jewel, and a bundle of letters."

Cyrene squeezed his fingers in return. She had understood.

"I defy the lady to say I took aught from her," said Jack Niven boldly, and his eyes seemed to wink at her. What did he know, or was it merely bravado?

"May the lady see the jewel?" asked Sir Rupert.

Hilditch took laboriously from his pocket a packet, which he opened and rolled out on his knee—the guineas, a diamond, and the letters!

Miss Pomeroy went forward and looked at the spoil.

"No," she said slowly; "'tis not mine. It cannot have been he."

"Oh, Madam, these tobymen have a heap o' tricks," said Hilditch pompously. "Bless your heart, there's no believing in them. Maybe 'twas he all the same."

"I said I took nothing from her," said the sardonic Nevin.

"'Twas not the letters by chance?" said Hilditch with a sudden inspiration.

"Oh, no; oh, dear no," said Cyrene emphatically, for she was aware that to claim them would not be to obtain possession of them. They were in the custody of the law. She exchanged a look with Sir Rupert, whose face beamed approval.

"I am sorry to have intruded," she said, with a careless bending of her head towards the constable.

"Say no more, Miss; say no more," said the gratified Hilditch. "We have a good case against him. Jack Niven, you shall ride in the cart, lad, for sure."

"Give me another glass," said the tobyman with swaggering indifference.

One of the constables laughed, and ordered glasses round of the host. Meanwhile, Sir Rupert and the lady withdrew.

In the other room they sat down, and for a time there was silence, each being deeply involved in thought. Then Cyrene spoke impulsively.

"They have them. All is lost. I can see no way."

"Give me time," said Sir Rupert confidently. "Damme, I will not be beat." He remained absorbed by his reflections for some time longer, and then he rose.

"Why, as we have caught him, or, rather, he is caught, we are absolved of our vow," said he gaily. "We will have food and rest."

"If you will," she answered with a sigh; and he went out to give his orders. At the same time he inquired carelessly of the innkeeper how long his visitors would remain.

"Why, Sir," says Boniface, "they have been questing all night and are weary. You shall see them sit and make merry there over their capture for an hour or more. Then, ho for Newgate and the Tree!"

He spoke as if it were an admirable jest, but Sir Rupert did not mind the man's callousness. He ordered breakfast forthwith and went back to the lady.

Miss Pomeroy ate very well, despite her anxiety for her brother; for, indeed, poor girl, she had gone through much and was exhausted.

"Have you a plan, Sir Rupert?" she asked.

"I have one," said he; "but I will not tell it, lest it prove false to me. Yet I will swear to recover the letters. I will go to prison in the effort, maybe; but I will do it." This he said in the growing admiration of her beauty, which was not at all depreciated by her weariness and the early morning hours. He would say no more, but she thanked him gratefully, yet with a little doubt. No sooner had he finished his meal than he left her and went into the tap-room to the company, where Mr. Hilditch and his companions were engaged in reminiscences with their prisoner.

Cyrene sat in a state of suspense and anxiety, and endeavoured to while away the time until he should return. The little window commanded a view of the road towards Hampstead as far as the bend in it, and as she was distressfully looking out upon the new day, she saw a chaise and pair turn the corner sharply, and dash up to the Packhorse. From it alighted, to her amazement and concern, no other than the Earl of Tiverton, who entered the house with his customary assertion of authority and indifference to everyone and everything. The next moment the handle turned, and the nobleman stood before her.

He was red of face, and bore the marks of the last night's dissipation on him, but he wore a most resolute and angry look.

"So, Madam," said he abruptly, "'twas you, was it? I have tracked you at last, and a pretty run you gave me. I thought it was the man. Had I but guessed 'twas you, I would have taken other precautions, but I thought you was in Somerset. Now, Miss, the bundle, sharply! Step in! You have led me a dance, you vixen."

Cyrene had risen to her feet, and, although she was pale, she displayed no signs of fear.

"This, then, is the latest of your escapades, which should indeed take another name, my Lord," said she with scorn. "You would make yourself the tool of a wicked woman to ruin one who has done you no harm, and is kin to you by marriage."

"Faith, Cyrene, I care not what he be, nor care I what comes to him. Yet 'tis not to ruin him, but to save him," said the Earl bluffly.

"'Tis most gracious in my Lady Merioneth—"

"What know you of her?" asked his Lordship shortly.

"Why, you were ever in the service of some woman," said Cyrene with spirit, "save only your wife, my poor cousin. 'Tis your reputation. Yet you are not content with your fame as a fine buck of town, but must ruffle it with your callous associates till the town rings of your violence and your deeds of valour. Three to set upon one poor man that suspected nothing from you!"

"Tush, Cyrene, you have a tongue," said my Lord good-humouredly. "I care not a jack for Claverdale. 'Tis not he is kin to Kitty, but you, through your father. As for the poor man, he is guilty of conspiracy against his Majesty. Not that I take any account of that," he added with characteristic levity.

Through Cyrene's mind were running many thoughts. How had he tracked her to this remote inn? He had not known who had taken the letters, but he had evidently been put on the way by someone. It could not have been either of his Mohock friends, for they had not seen her. Yet he was a quick, determined man, and he had evidently obtained news of her. How was it possible? She saw at once that she must play with him, for he was not the man to be put off his purpose; he must not know that the letters were not in her possession, or in his masterful way he might be able to secure them even from the law. He was capable of anything when on the wings of a strong passion.

"My Lord," said she, "I think you do yourself injustice. My brother has been foolish, yet surely 'tis not you who should desire harm to him for that. You are no Government spy."

"Not I," he answered, laughing lightly. "Nor do I desire him harm, though he is too much of a parson for me. But I must have the letters; so out with them, Miss."

"'Tis impossible," said Cyrene quietly. "I have destroyed them."

My Lord Tiverton uttered an oath.

"If you have done that—" he began, and cast a glance at the hearth, where no fire burned that summer morning. "So you have ate them, Miss," said he sardonically, and made a step towards her. But at the moment the door opened, and the complacent innkeeper entered.

"I regret, Sir, to have kept you waiting—" he began.

"Who the Devil told you to come?" demanded his Lordship brusquely.

"Why, seeing your chaise, Sir, and being anxious to satisfy all my customers—" stammered the innkeeper. "But with this excitement, Sir, and so many to serve," he interrupted himself eagerly, "I have been remiss. With Jack Niven—the great Niven—in custody—"

"Who the deuce is Niven?" asked his Lordship surlily.

"Why, the highwayman that is taken for stealing of a purse at Finchley, Sir." He glanced at Cyrene. "Indeed, this lady thought maybe that he had stolen something of hers, but 'twas not so."

Lord Tiverton's face underwent a change.

"Ha, is that so?" said he. "Well, fetch me a glass of brandy, man, and, hark you, I will interview the constables. 'Twould give me satisfaction to clap eyes on such a villain."

He broke out laughing, and, as the innkeeper retired, turned with a quizzical look at Cyrene.

"So, Miss," said he, "I find what brings you here, after all. I remember now that scoundrelly coachman whom I met spoke of a highwayman that had stopped him. I begin to see. We thought 'twas the man had the letters, and 'twas you, and yet 'tis not you, eh? There was something stole from you, was there?" He frowned, considering. "Who is this man that we followed, and that chased you, and where is he?" he asked. "I cannot understand it."

But Cyrene was not going to give him any assistance. "My Lord, I will not be hectored," said she with spirit, although, indeed, she was feeling utterly depressed. "I have told you that the letters are destroyed. That is all your answer."

She saw now that the wretched coachman had, on his way back, encountered my Lord, and, to make his peace possibly, had told all he knew—which was how the Earl had chanced upon her.

"So," says Tiverton, smiling. "Well, Miss, where you have failed, I think 'tis likely I will succeed." And with an amiable nod he left her to her fears.

of the animal were indicated and approved. When this was over, Sir Rupert conducted his friend into the inn again, but not into the tap-room. Here he declared that he must be on the road at once, and would like, before departing, to drink to Hilditch's promotion.

"So smart an officer—" said he very amiably; and Hilditch modestly dropped his eyes.

"Well, 'tis no credit to me if I am," said he: "I am an old hand." And he accepted a potent glass of brandy.

Now this made unfriendly company with the ale he had taken, and he talked a great deal; until, indeed, he was brought up by Sir Rupert's sudden request.

"Will you let me see the diamond again?" said he. "Perhaps the lady was too agitated to tell clearly. Maybe I shall have better eyes."

Nothing loth, the constable drew out once more the packet, which he laid on the bar; and it was unrolled. There lay the guineas, the diamond, and the packet of papers. Sir Rupert had ere this made his plans. They were simple, but they were bold. In his pocket was a bundle of bank-notes which, in point of fact, had been destined to pay some of his gaming



"Who the Devil told you to come?"

Meanwhile, Sir Rupert had been engaged in very agreeable conversation with the constables, more particularly Mr. Hilditch. That fat fellow lolled on his seat, nursing his tankard and narrating many exploits of the road which had passed under his notice. Naturally he magnified the skill and intelligence of the high toby, against which the cunning of the officers must pit itself.

"But Jack," he said vaingloriously, "would ha' been took six months ago, saving for his nag. Will ye confess that, Jack?"

The highwayman blinked and nodded. He was clearly a man of address, and was not wasting time or words. Maybe his captors would, by their potations, give him a chance later.

"Said I not so?" resumed Hilditch, puffing. "You bear witness I could have nicked him, Joyce, six months ago, but for his nag?"

Joyce agreed. "'Tis a stalwart, fine creature," he said, "and shows no wear after twenty miles."

"This must be a rare animal," said Sir Rupert, who was anxious to detach Hilditch from the rest of the party; "I should like to see him. I am purchasing a horse, and would like some advice. What say you, constable? Might I trouble you for a few minutes to inspect him?"

Hilditch was tickled in his vanity to be invited by so lordly a gentleman, and at once assented. The two proceeded to the stables, and the points

debts of the previous night. His hand clutched these now, which, oddly enough, were tied up in a bundle with pink tape like the letters. He bent over the diamond, scrutinising it with apparent interest, and then shook his head.

"I fear 'tis not hers," he said, and lifted his glass. "To your health, constable; and may you lay by the heels many more thieves in this gallant fashion!"

The constable smiled, and, putting back his head, tossed off the remainder of his glass. When he set it down, says Sir Rupert to him—

"You have not examined this bundle?" and he tapped the bundle on the bar.

"No, Sir," said Hilditch. "'Tis for headquarters. They are papers of some sort."

"Why, they have more the air of bank-notes," said the bold Sir Rupert. "Constable, you're in luck."

Hilditch regarded the bundle.

"Aye, it may be so," said he with some interest. "They will hang him higher."

Sir Rupert clapped him amiably on the back.

"You will hang him high enough," said he, and, nodding a farewell, left the worthy constable.

He could hardly go fast enough, and dashed into the room where he had left Miss Pomeroy in a state of ill-suppressed excitement. She was standing at the table with a troubled look, and met him trepidant.

"I have them," said he triumphantly.

She uttered a cry.

"Give me them. Oh, are you sure?" And as he handed them to her, "Yes, yes; oh, how good you are! We must burn them at once. He is here." She looked, as Lord Tiverton had looked, involuntarily at the fireplace.

"Who is here?" he asked.

"Why, Lord Tiverton. He has tracked us here. He knows that the highwayman had the letters. He is even now trying to obtain possession. Oh, how can we destroy them?"

"'Tis impossible," he said. "There is no means here. Let me have them. I will take them and destroy them."

"Yes, I will trust you—altogether," she cried impulsively. "But—" she paused. "You are afoot. You would be taken if he suspects. I—" again she paused while her wits played about the situation. "Yes, take them and go, and let me know they are destroyed." She thrust them into his hands. "I will delay him. I will play him. Go, go! If I know my Lord there is not a moment to lose."

Almost thrust out of doors, Sir Rupert went, having concealed the bundle in his pocket. He walked briskly away from the Packhorse and turned the elbow of the road. It seemed that he must walk, and, although he was triumphant, he was very tired.

As he tramped along the highway ten minutes later he was aware of the approach of a chaise from behind, and, turning, saw it trotting sharply towards him. When it was abreast, what was his amazement to recognise in the occupants the Earl of Tiverton and Miss Pomeroy, apparently on good terms with each other. It was beyond belief, and he could only wonder mutely at the ways of woman.

The explanation of this strange situation was, as a matter of fact, simple. No sooner was Sir Rupert gone than Lord Tiverton arrived in a fury. He had made inquiries, and had found that what was taken on the highwayman was some guineas, a diamond, and a bundle of bank-notes. Therefore his trouble had been all for nothing, and he was in no sweet temper.

"I told you that they were destroyed," said Cyrene coolly.

"That they're not, Miss!" he said savagely. "You have 'em somewhere, and I'll tear 'em from you!"

"Very well, my Lord," said she, with dignity; "but let us be reasonable. If they are not destroyed, I have them still; if they are, they are beyond your power. If not, I am willing to go back with you, to my cousin Kitty, and you shall have leave to search."

My Lord gazed at her with a grin.

"You're well plucked," said he. "I'll take you at your word. We will drive forthwith."

Which was how Cyrene and the Mohock came in each other's company in the chaise.

My Lord was not at all displeased, for he reasoned that Cyrene was relying upon chance and circumstances to outwit him, and he indulged in several pleasantries as they drove back, pleasantries which were calculated to dispel her hopes of doing so.

"Kitty shall not save you," said he. "By the Lord, Miss, you must not trust to Kitty. You shall be properly searched."

But Cyrene said nothing. It was only when they reached town that she was unable to resist a *riposo* of her own.

"And now, my Lord," said she pleasantly, "that you have done me the service to fetch me home, let us cease this idle chatter. Though the letters were not destroyed when I told you so, they are by now."

"What do you mean?" he demanded in wonder.

"Why, they are in other hands," she said demurely.

My Lord Tiverton slapped his knee.

"You jade!" said he. "There was the man—I had forgot him. The Devil! Who was he?"

Cyrene smiled. "One your Lordship does not know," she replied.

"Egad, I'll find him out," he said angrily, "and pay him out for this. Damme, what a cod's-head am I!"

Cyrene said nothing, for already she had begun to repent of her indiscretion.

Lord Tiverton called out to his coachman to stop, and got out.

"Look you, Cyrene," said he. "You're mighty clever. You have diddled me, and I owe you a grudge. But, faith, I won't pay it. You're too pretty. 'Tis the man that shall bleed for it, by —!" and, bidding the coachman drive on to his house, he walked away swiftly in the direction of Mayfair.

Cyrene looked after him in dismay. She had turned his wrath on Sir Rupert Valence.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BULLY OF LONDON TOWN.

SIR RUPERT reached town late in the morning, very tired and cross, having had to walk almost the whole distance. He was chagrined by this, and also he was perplexed by the astonishing terms on which Miss Pomeroy and Lord Tiverton appeared to be. First he reduced the letters to a heap of ashes, and then ate a little, and afterwards slept a good deal. By the time he had risen and dressed it was towards evening, and he felt more cheerful. Then he set out to visit Claverdale, with the expectation that he would also see Miss Pomeroy.

This hope, however, was doomed to disappointment. When he had been admitted, and was alone with Claverdale, his friend's pale face questioned him. For answer he took out his snuff-box and poured some dirty ashes on the table.

"'Tis there," said he, unable to contain his exultation. At that Claverdale showed more feeling than he had ever before displayed, and thanked him warmly.

"I heard from my sister," said he, "that you had the letters, and, I will confess, 'tis a relief. It seems you mistook each other. I am under a burden of obligation to you both. 'Twas Tiverton, the ruffian. Such fellows would not flourish under the Prince, if he should come by his own. But I am sorely in your debt, Valence, and you shall know it."

Whereupon he launched out with some frankness about Lady Merioneth, who, he said, had pursued him for months, and who would not shrink from jeopardising his liberty or life to save her wounded vanity. In the end, to celebrate his freedom, he insisted on carrying off Sir Rupert to sup, which they did in great magnificence. For all this, however, Sir Rupert heard nothing of the lady whom he had desired to meet again.

While this celebration was in progress a meeting of quite another sort was taking place at Lady Merioneth's house. Lord Tiverton had reported his failure, and was loud in his anger, to which the lady joined hers.

"'Tis Sir Rupert Valence," said she viciously, "that pink-and-white boy. He overheard our plot, and I was obliged to let him have part in it. But I did not guess how things would fall. He has been captured by the girl."

"I will spit him for making me the laughing-stock," said Lord Tiverton sullenly.

"And for making mock of me," says she, languishing at him.

"And for that first," said my Lord admiringly.

My Lady, indeed, resented the young man's conduct very deeply, more especially as it proved to her that her attractions and influence were rated inferior to another's. It was not handsome conduct in a great lady, particularly as Sir Rupert's youth and inexperience might well have pleaded for him with success. But Lady Merioneth's heart was of stone, or, rather, if one may use the figure, was as a sponge that is quickly filled and as quickly squeezed, and held no emotion or passion for any length of time. This fine creature, then, chose, in the ardour of her anger, to make a victim of the boy of four-and-twenty, and for that purpose enlisted my Lord Tiverton in her vendetta. My Lord had been for some time enrolled among her admirers, and had hotly besieged that citadel which was never valiantly, but always capriciously, defended.

The Earl, too, as he openly professed, had his own quarrel to pursue, and would pursue it. Tall, handsome, and bold of eye, my Lord at seven-and-twenty had drawn the attention of the fashionable world by his extravagances. He commanded more by sheer brute personality than because of any intelligence or wit in his nature. He was brief, bluff, and domineering; he had no graces of language or manner; he might even have been called stupid; but he had an iron will, the obstinacy of the devil, and an inordinate belief in himself and his powers. This fashionable bully was the instrument which was to break young Sir Rupert for the caprice of a great lady. "I was told afterwards by Lord Bygrave," says Sir Rupert complacently in his memoirs, "that my Lord Tiverton, having undertaken the job for her Ladyship, went seeking me three days, which if I had known, he might very well have come at me with my permission." It was not, however, as it chanced, until the evening of the fourth day that they met, at Button's coffee-house. My Lord Tiverton had been drinking more than coffee, and was clad in the most elegant bravery, and attended by some of his familiars. He was proceeding, indeed, to a masked rout in Soho, and had stepped in to kill Sir Rupert Valence, Baronet, on the way. There he sat with Sir Hugh Clement and Mr. Guildford Wellings, drinking and laughing with an arrogant flourish of indifference to the company that was in itself an insult. Yet none resented the outrageous behaviour of the intruders, some of those there being peaceable folk, and others being aware of my Lord's identity and reputation. But when he had sat long enough, he demanded what o'clock it was, called for rum-punch though it was warm weather, and swore at the humble apologies and explanations of the waiter.

"Very well," says he, "show me which is Sir Rupert Valence here."

But the man had no knowledge of the Baronet, who had come thither by accident, and, to say the truth (if one may judge from some of his remarks), had been very greatly bored by the disquisition of the wits.

"There is no gentleman of that name," says the waiter anxiously. "None such comes here; but there is Mr. Tickell and Mr. Cibber, or," says he, with a flash of hope, "Sir Richard Steele. 'Tis he yonder that—"

"Confound your Sir Richard Steele!" said Tiverton, interrupting; "I shall have a use for steel, but that presently. 'Tis Sir Rupert Valence I want, and, rogue, ye must find him. He is here for certain, as I have traced him. Come, I have no time to lose."

The poor man was opening his mouth for further explanations when Lord Tiverton rudely hustled him off with a motion of his hands, and said he, turning to Sir Hugh, "I cannot afford him more than ten minutes by my watch. That should suffice for the Squire."

The waiter, meanwhile, went about helplessly among the company, asking for Sir Rupert; but as he had not the name aright, there was little to come out of this. Such a ruffler was not wont to visit Button's, and the assembly there was in a state of attention, and stared broadly.

"Sir Rufus what?" cried Sir Richard Steele testily to the flustered waiter. "Why the devil d'ye suppose I should be Sir Rufus anything?" for, indeed, the unfortunate man, with my Lord's imperious voice ringing in his ears, had quite lost his wits and was questioning people at hazard. This sound carried across the room to where my Lord sat, and he looked up from his talk with his friends. Then he rose and came forward.

"Gentlemen," said he in a voice of command, but quite civil and smiling, "I am sorry my messenger has set you by the ears. I am only

come here to make an acquaintance which I have long desired, and maybe one of you will be so good as to aid me. Is Sir Rupert Valence here?"

At the words Sir Rupert, who was seated in a corner with "some long-winded fat fellow," as he describes him, started and rose up where he was, noticing my Lord for the first time.

"I am Sir Rupert Valence," said he in some bewilderment, and not a little expectation.

My Lord Tiverton, as he says, measured him with a glance and grinned. "Twas as if he took my length for the coffin," says Sir Rupert in his memoirs. And then, amid the silence of the company, he turned to Sir Hugh Clement.

"Introduce us," says he curtly; and Sir Hugh, who had never clapped eyes on the boy before, had the impudence to step out and

"Have a care—have a care, young gentleman," says Sir Richard; "this man has a reputation which bodes you no good."

"Damme!" cries Sir Rupert arrogantly, "I can take care of myself, Sir," and swept away towards my Lord. "I am proud to make your acquaintance, my Lord," he said in a lofty manner. "In what way can I serve you?"



The constable smiled and tossed off the remainder of his glass.

My Lord was not given to ceremonies, and spoke bluntly enough.

"Why, we will see about that a little later, by your leave. And in the meantime, let us quit this place; it smells of a hog-pen." And calling on Sir Hugh and Mr. Wellings, he went forth, with the boy behind him.

As has been said, and as sufficiently appears, the Earl of Tiverton was wont to use little ceremony, leaning, as he did, so largely upon his own belief in himself; but he was enough of a gentleman to approach his goal with some delicacy.

At the tavern which they had entered, he asked Sir Rupert to drink with him, and recommended a rum-punch of strong flavour. This did Sir Rupert,

make formal presentations. Sir Rupert naturally had some suspicions, although he did not quite guess what was forward.

"I am your Lordship's humble servant," said he, bowing and awaiting events. Here, however, he felt one plucking him by the coat, and, turning about impatiently, saw Sir Richard Steele's red face, his wig awry, frowning at him.

who was wondering what was to come next, and why these friendly advances were made.

"I drink to our better acquaintance," said he gallantly.

My Lord Tiverton laughed, showing his teeth.

"To our closer acquaintance, no doubt," said he. "I may drink that, Sir, but I fear 'tis not a long one."

"It will not be my fault, Sir, if it be not durable."

"It depends on your hand, Sir," says Tiverton, winking at Sir Hugh; but even the wink, it seems, did not draw the young man's suspicions further, for he knew not what sort of a man he had to deal with. He put forth his arm.

"Here is my hand, my Lord," he said, "if you will do me the honour to take it."

He had a certain admiration of Lord Tiverton's notoriety, as he ingenuously confesses; and, moreover, he had the exquisite knowledge of having worsted him. But did my Lord know that?

My Lord gazed at him curiously, being (we may suppose) taken by his spirit and impulsive ness.

"Damme, no!" says he bluntly now. "I can't take that. I have filled you with punch, Sir Rupert, but now we must come to business. I will drink with you, by Heaven, yes! for you are a man of spirit, I perceive. And I profess, Sir, I will kill you in all friendliness."

At that Sir Rupert started.

"What!" he cried, "you will kill me! Is't a jest, my Lord?" And he looked, uncertain whether to laugh, upon the three faces. These acquainted him with the nature of the errand, which he had foolishly thought might be the fruit of a desire to know him. "So," says he, "you want to pick a quarrel, my Lord?" and stared at him, for he now saw what had been aimed at.

My Lord was grinning affably.

"Jack," says he indifferently to Sir Hugh Clement, "Jack, is there no more punch, you sandbag?"

"Slife, I'll call for another," says Mr. Wellings, in his most soft and elegant voice. "Let us all be happily drunk if we must be slitting each other's throats. I'll vow, Sir Rupert, that my Lord has no ill-will to you."

"Not I," said Tiverton, loudly demanding the drawer. "But I will not be drunken—I have an appointment at La Velouse's rout by midnight. Sir Rupert, will ye drink to me?"

He raised his glass as he spoke and glanced humorously towards the boy, whose wits were disordered by this remarkable conduct. Here was a man who challenged him to a duel and yet was desirous of drinking affably with him. He wondered if, after all, the thing was a jest and Lord Tiverton was merely anxious to make his acquaintance.

"I will drink to you gladly, my Lord," said he frankly, "if I may drink in friendship."

"Oh, we may fight in friendship—we may do anything in friendship. All that we do is done in friendship—is't not so, Jack?" returned my Lord.

"Stap me! yes," assented Sir Hugh.

The complete understanding between the three and his own mystification began to annoy the youth, who felt called upon to assert himself.

"My Lord," he said very boldly and ceremoniously, "whether you be drunk or I, I cannot say, but I am at a loss to follow you. Let us come at this business more clearly."

"D'ye hear, Jack? He calls me drunk," said my Lord gravely. "Damme, I'll have his blood for that!"

"Ecod, but you cannot, Tivvy," said Mr. Wellings tipsily. "As if 'twas an offence to be so charged! I take it as an honour."

"I must ask what you mean, Sir," persisted Sir Rupert, getting more angry.

"Why, the bantam begins to crow," says Tiverton amiably. "If it were not for this business in hand I would have another punch."

"You were best not," said Sir Hugh in warning.

"Sir Rupert," said my Lord, "you have charged me with being drunk. This can only have one end."

"The sooner the better, Sir!" cried Sir Rupert, now furious at being so contemptuously treated.

Sir Hugh put his heels together. "May I put myself at your service, Sir?" he asked politely.

My Lord Tiverton broke out laughing. "Don't be like a damned French dancing-master, Jack," said he.

But Sir Rupert accepted the offer with dignity. "You will bear me witness, Sir, that this quarrel has been thrust on me," he said fiercely.

"Now, if I'm a judge, it has been thrust on Tivvy, too," says Mr. Wellings, tittering.

"Hold your tipsy tongue," enjoined the Earl sharply.

Sir Rupert turned away in disgust, feeling his dignity would be compromised if he should stay; but was stopped on his way to the door. "Tis agreed to meet at Lincoln's Inn Fields," says Sir Hugh in his ear. "I will have chairs called forthwith," and to his amazement the youth found that he was to fight that night.

In his chair he was, as he confesses, consumed with an indignation at the way he had been used, so that his anger mounted to a ferocity by the time of his arrival on the ground. It was now on the stroke of midnight, and there is no doubt that all the party had drunk as much as was good for them. Yet the two opponents faced one another with very different tempers: Lord Tiverton smiling, hard of face, and contemptuous of eye; Sir Rupert hot, splenetic even, and full of a resolve to teach this arrogant bully a lesson. At the word he darted his point forward, and engaged, and, pushing his antagonist with his native impetuosity, seemed to gain an advantage. My Lord dropped away with an oath, and lost the smile on his face. The points engaged again, and as Sir Rupert says, "I thought he had me through the groin," but a lucky slip was the cause of his escape. The next instant Valence's sword ran out, and Lord Tiverton uttered an exclamation.

"Curse him, he has took my arm," he said, and held up bare arm and bare blade to the light, scrutinising the wound.

Mr. Wellings also bent his tipsy face over the wound.

"You're done, Tivvy," says he; "'tis your sword-arm."

My Lord cursed abominably. "I will spit him like a turkey for all that," he declared savagely.

"Oh, come, let be," said Sir Hugh; "you have got all you need for to-night."

"I will have a rag about it and spit him, I say!" said the Earl furiously.

"I will be no party to it," declared Sir Hugh, who was in command of his senses, and was a man of some judgment; and he took my Lord by the sleeve and was whispering in his ears.

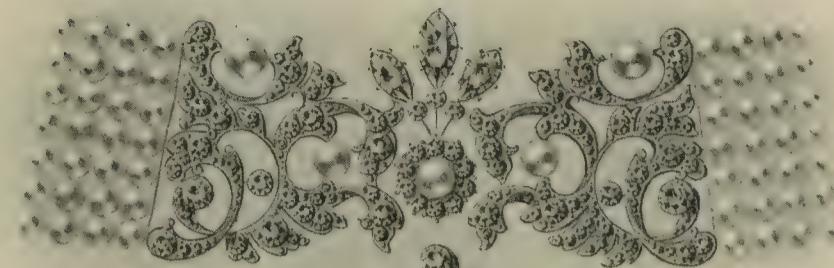
"Oh, very well," said the Earl at last impatiently. "I will be even with you to-morrow, Sir Rupert. I have an appointment I should be loth to miss. What's the time, Jack? Oh, damme, there goes the clock! I shall be late. I had thought to have buried you stark and stiff by this, Sir Rupert. Curse me, how this prick stings! Jack, give me a rag!" And, nodding unceremoniously to his late antagonist, the Earl strode off.



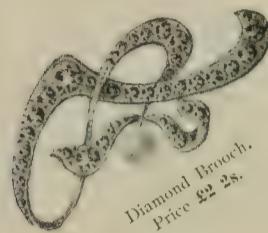
He reduced the letters to a heap of ashes.



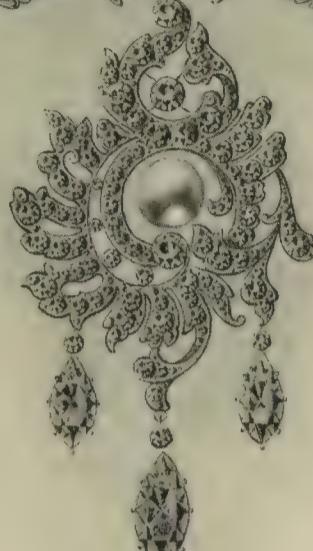
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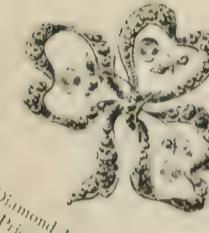
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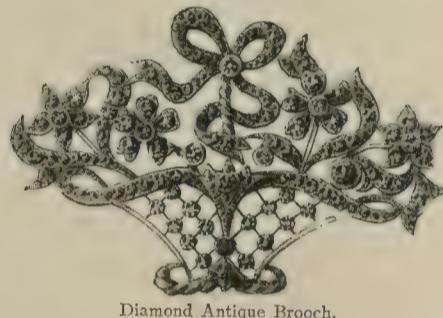
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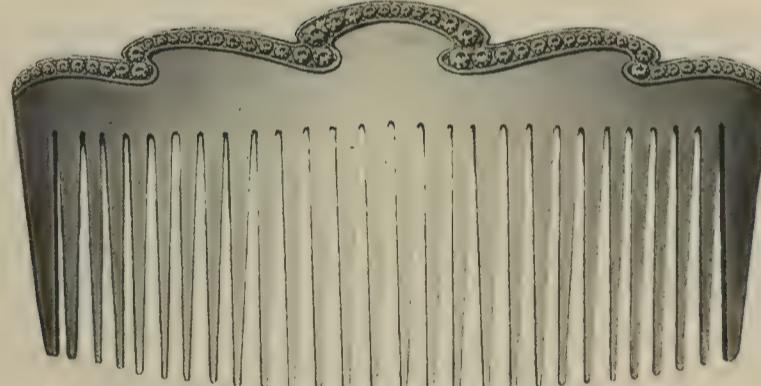
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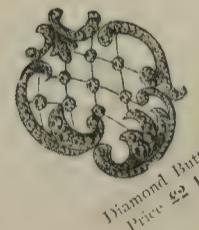
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with his two companions towards the chairs, leaving the young man alone to cool himself in the gentle breezes of the night.

Sir Rupert, in cooling, began to thrill pleasantly. It dawned on him with a sense of satisfaction that he had met the notorious Lord Tiverton and worsted him. Here, surely, was cause for pride, the achievement being rare enough, if all stories were true. The Mohock had come safely out of many fatal encounters, and was undoubtedly a dangerous man to quarrel with. As Sir Rupert's chair went southwards through the nest of alleys by Drury Lane, the chairmen, stumbling, collided with some others, and the Baronet was pitched roughly to the earth. In a moment he was on his feet heady with anger, and indignant, no doubt, that so notable a duellist should receive such treatment from a passing stranger.

"What the devil do you mean?" he began; but got no farther, for the light of a lamp fell on the occupant of the other chair, and he recognised my Lord Bygrave.

"You are very fierce, Sir," said this latter, regarding him unperturbed,

tavern. The room was bare of people, and together they talked yet pleasantly, my Lord being "affable, as becomes one of his position," remarks Sir Rupert, "and speaking of several noblemen and gentlemen of public character." Then came he at last to Lady Merioneth, for he was an inquisitive fellow that loved scandals and to gather knowledge to himself. Upon mention of Lady Merioneth Sir Rupert showed some little diffidence.

"She is an odd woman," he said. "I cannot understand her. I believe I mistrust her."

Lord Bygrave emitted a thin cackle of laughter. "Why, you are being educated fast, Sir Rupert," said he; "we shall have you as wise as my Lord Tiverton soon, and indeed wiser, for 'tis not apparent that he mistrusts the lady. Yet how came you quarrelling?"

At that, Sir Rupert, being heated and ruffled by the recollection of his treatment, poured out his story, yet with no names or particulars. But these were the most alert ears in London, and Lord Bygrave was soon in a position to add to his store of gossip, to make links, as it were, in his study of Society.



"Sir Rufus what?" cried Sir Richard Steele testily.

"but it might have occurred to you to inquire if your chair or mine was at fault ere you burst out."

"I beg your pardon, my Lord," said Sir Rupert contritely, for my Lord Bygrave had shown himself friendly to the youth. "I have been put upon to-night, so that I am suspicious without reason."

My Lord recognised him then. "Oh, 'tis young Acres," he said pleasantly; "I hope you have been keeping tally of yourself, Sir Rupert. I fear you are a hot-head."

"Indeed, 'tis not I," protested Valence, "but my Lord Tiverton. I had no quarrel with him, but he must thrust one on me."

Lord Bygrave stared. "Lord Tiverton!" he echoed.

"I have given him what he needed," cried Valence, his young vanity crowing in him. "I have sent him off with a sore arm, I'll warrant."

"Ah!" said Bygrave thoughtfully, and contemplated him. "Well, Sir," he went on presently, "'tis a warm night, and I suppose you will not go to bed yet. I shall be happy for your company for half an hour."

Sir Rupert expressed his delight, and the chairs proceeded. But, as a matter of fact, they got no farther than the Strand, for there my Lord found that the heat of the night had bred a thirst, and they entered a

"And why my Lord pursued me so bitterly," concluded the young man, "or how he came to know that I was the instrument that foiled his unworthy purpose, I am at a loss to know."

But Lord Bygrave was not; he had guessed at Claverdale, and he identified his old acquaintance, Lady Merioneth, as the power behind all.

"Why," said he, "these things will leak out, and maybe—" He came to a sudden stop, and tapped Valence on the arm. There streamed through the open door of the tavern, which was well known and much frequented, a noise of tongues, and Sir Rupert, looking round, saw to his amazement none other than his late antagonist enter with a following. Lord Tiverton did not glance in their direction, nor, apparently, did Clement or Wellings, who were of the party. They were all very merry; but my Lord Tiverton carried his right arm in a sling.

"Damme, I have missed her to-night," he was saying loudly, "and all on account of that young bantam. Pinked my arm, egad! 'Sdeath, he's as cold as mutton to-morrow, eh, Jack?"

At that the talk broke out noisily, and Sir Rupert listened to an account of the duel, as well as to the rehearsal of many scandals, several of which he relates in his memoirs. He was open-mouthed at these, when Lord Bygrave whispered in his ear—

"Sir Rupert, if you will take advice from an older man who wishes you well enough, you will go home."

"I fear not him nor any man," protested the youth, warmed by his wine and the companionship.

"I have no doubt as to your courage," said Bygrave grimly. "But maybe it will not be that that is wanted to-night. See you, there is a notorious crew that has made much trouble in the streets; and what is more, they are tippling themselves into condition. Add to that, Sir, that the chief of them is he that has a grudge against you—and how does the situation look?"

"I know not why he should have a grudge against me," said Sir Rupert, reluctant, like a boy, to obey his mentor. "I foiled him, but we've crossed swords—and that is nothing between gentlemen."

The Earl uttered an exclamation and tossed away his sling. "If I be not man enough for this whippersnapper with half an arm," he said contemptuously, "call me oyster."

"Better go," whispered Lord Bygrave in Valence's ear; "they will do you an injury. They are beyond themselves."

"Sir, I will meet you gladly when you are recovered," said Sir Rupert simply.

"He turns craven; he cries off," said Mr. Wellings.



"You speak of gentlemen," says my Lord. "Know you not"—and then with impatience: "'Sblood, child, this is Lady Merioneth's bravo! Have ye not scented that? 'Tis she behind this."

At this Sir Rupert was taken aback very sharply, and there is no doubt that the gravity of his companion had made an impression on him. He had not, in the innocence of his youth, looked for such remarkable malignity in anyone, much less in a handsome woman. There is no doubt that he would have yielded and gone, but, unhappily, at that moment Mr. Guildford Wellings espied him, and tipsily called on him. Lord Tiverton looked round and scowled.

"'Slife, here is the boy with the bodkin," said he. "Stap me! he shall have a needle through him to-night."

"Not to-night, Tivvy," cried out someone, "there's your arm."

"Curse him, he has took my arm!"

"Damme! he lost me a petticoat this night," said Lord Tiverton with an access of savagery, as if he had just remembered, "now I will not spare him. Draw, draw!"

As Sir Rupert stood, uncertain, indignant, and somewhat uneasy, Lord Bygrave pushed forward and confronted the group.

"My Lord," he said suavely, "you have a reputation, I recall, for judgment and for the niceties of conduct. You will, I make no doubt,

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see that to take advantage of this gentleman in his present state would be unbecoming."

"In his present state?" echoed Lord Tiverton dully.

"Why, yes. Where's your eyes, my Lord? I have with great difficulty kept him on his legs this half-hour."

A peal of laughter rang from the roysterers, and Sir Rupert, who was scarlet of face, sprang forward angrily, but was arrested by a strong hand.

"If you go not now and without more ado I will surrender you to them," said Bygrave. "They are Mohock-mad. You can meet my Lord to-morrow if you will, fool!"

My Lord's commanding tone and his look of severity were not without effect upon the lad. Almost unconsciously he obeyed a gesture, and was silent. Lord Bygrave took his arm and conducted him towards the door. A shout followed them.

"If he be drunk to-day he shall be dead to-morrow!" cried the Earl of Tiverton coarsely. "Put him to bed, Sir, while you may."

Outside, Lord Bygrave paused. "'Twas good advice in that tipsy fellow's suggestion," he said. "Go to bed while ye may. Here's my chair, and yours is yonder." With which he made him a farewell salute and left him. But by this time Sir Rupert had sufficiently recovered to feel displeased at his ignoble exit. For a moment he thought of returning

gotten him at last, and there can be no complaint now, as we are by this time as drunken as himself."

The young bucks, drawn by the words, made a ring round the unfortunate Valence, who was thus, for the third time, subjected to the caprice and horseplay of the most unscrupulous huff in town. With a feeling of anger he protested against the interference, and submitted to Lord Tiverton curtly that he was at my Lord's service on the morrow.

"Damme, 'tis the morrow now!" said Tiverton. And, sure enough, the clock by St. Martin's at the moment was striking two. There rose a tumult among the others, each calling out, and all declaring with much violence of tongue that Sir Rupert should fight. The brawl (for such an aspect it assumed) was, however, brought to a close by the young man's surrender.

"Very well," says he, "and if I kill my Lord, as I shall hope, the town may well thank me."

"Why, I believe it will," said my Lord, gravely tipsy.

Then someone asked where they should meet, and none seemed to know, as all suggested different places; but my Lord, who was far from sober, had a notion of his own, which came suddenly to him.

"Rip me, here is my house!" he cried, pointing near by. "Let us be free from interruption"; which was readily welcomed by the gang.



Sir Rupert banged-to the heavy oak, and shot a bolt.

to the tavern, and facing and cowing, of course, his wretched persecutors. But, happily, his good sense prevented this folly, and his annoyance only vented itself in an abrupt dismissal of the chair.

"I will walk home," says he; which, if things had not chanced otherwise, might have been wise, as conducing to a cool brain.

Fortune, however, had not done with Sir Rupert that night. He walked leisurely towards Golden Square, watched idly a fracas in the street between two gentlemen, and dawdled by the market, where the morning was already beginning. He had got no further than Rupert Street when he became aware of a great disturbance behind him, and, turning, beheld a commotion on the roadway. There were cries for help, and oaths, and voices shouting riotously. He went back, and made out that some gentlemen were engaged in beating the chairmen, with whom, there had no doubt been some tipsy dispute. This was not a matter which concerned Sir Rupert, and appeared to be a matter, after all, of little consequence; as the contention had subsided by the time he reached the scene. The gang of roysterers, having settled the chairmen to their own satisfaction, advanced with laughter, and the next moment Valence was surrounded on the footpath. He was jostled and thrust against the wall, but that, no doubt, would have ended the incident had it not been for a wanton trick of the dwindling moon. She flashed out of the clouds in heaven and struck on Sir Rupert's face—which there was an oath, and to his amazement, the Earl of Tiverton's voice rolled in his ear.

"Now, by Heaven, I have you, Squire! . . . Jack, here's luck! I have

Now Sir Rupert, who was sober enough to be heartily tired of these madmen, developed in that instant a thought; and, being carried along with the others, drifted to the door of the house which had been indicated. He found Sir Hugh Clement clinging to his arm, but this was more for support than out of any affection. Once before the door, he threw off Clement's arm and drew his sword.

"We are to fight inside?" he asked.

"At your pleasure, Sir," said Tiverton ceremoniously, and waved a hand as if inviting him to enter.

Sir Rupert paused a second and then ran up the steps lightly and knocked hard. Immediately there was the noise of a window opening above and someone looked out on the street, where, you may suppose, there was a noisy to-do.

"Who is that?" demanded a voice.

"Come, open, you fool," said the Earl impatiently.

The head was withdrawn, and it seems that there was some talk behind the window. Out comes the head once more. "Who is there?" demanded the voice again.

"Blockhead, 'tis I, the Earl of Tiverton," said my Lord angrily. "Open, or I will split your skull!"

The window was shut and the head disappeared, and presently after there was the noise of chains and bolts moving behind the door, and it was suddenly opened. Sir Rupert slipped quickly through, turned sharply, banged-to the heavy oak, and shot a bolt. An old man in the livery of a

servant stood in the hall with a flaming candle and started aback on seeing him.

"Who are you, Sir?" he asked tremulously.

"Why, am I not my Lord Tiverton?" replied Valence in good humour with himself at the success of his trick. "Anyhow, I am as good, my man."

The servant approached the door nervously, and made an essay to unbolt it, but Sir Rupert pushed him away.

"Get gone," he said; "I will have that bulwark between me and the assassins. D'ye think I will stand by to be murdered by a rascally pack of cut-throats? Not I; not I."

He spoke loudly, but his voice was wellnigh drowned in the uproar which prevailed upon the other side of the door. My Lord and his friends were battering on his own house in fury, and crying for entrance with curses. In the midst of it all, and while he was considering his next move, Sir Rupert heard a voice from the stairway, and, turning swiftly, saw a lady looking at him with wonder.

The stairway was dim, being lit up by the diffusion of light from a lamp on the first floor, so that he could see nothing but that this was a tall, slight figure that stood there. Then she spoke haughtily, and Sir Rupert thrilled to her voice at once.

"Pray, Sir, what do you here, and what noise is this you have fetched about these doors?"

"Miss Pomeroy!" cried he, with a beating heart, and she came swiftly forward in her impulsive way, emerging into a fuller light. It was Cyrene

"She looked more beautiful," says Sir Rupert, "than she had seemed even when I saw her last, brown of eye, and delicate of colour, with wide brows and a look that dwelled on you authoritatively."

"Sir Rupert Valence!" she said in wonder.

"Madam, there is a pack of bullies from whom I am sheltering," said he humbly, "and I have ventured to use this house as a means of escape."

Here the servant who had admitted him burst out with a cry that my Lord Tiverton himself was without, and that the gentleman would not suffer him to open.

"Is this so?" she asked, turning to Valence.

With a flush in his cheeks Sir Rupert admitted that it was, adding, "I have fought my Lord once, and he would fight again. I will meet him to-morrow, Madam, but by your leave not to-night, with his wolves behind him. May I make this house a passage for me?"

A rose-flush was on Cyrene's cheeks, and her lips were parted eagerly. "Oh, fie! you need not tell me. You are no coward, Sir. Heavens! do I not know that? You shall avoid them. I will do it, and cheat him even in his own house. You are right. With that roaring pack is death. They shall not."

She seemed to take Sir Rupert under a protection almost maternal, and came up to him and beckoned him up the stairs. At the top of the stairs a lady met them, pale, sad-eyed, and quiet.

"What is this, Cyrene?" she asked, and turned a handsome face on Sir Rupert. "'Tis late for a visitor," she added, with a little irony, which seemed, says Valence, to reside always in her voice.

Miss Pomeroy broke forth with the news, and turned to Sir Rupert;

"'Tis the Countess of Tiverton!" — to whom he bowed profoundly; and to her cousin, "Oh, Kitty, he saved Claverdale; and here is Tiverton wishes to eat him!"

"He shall not eat him," says Kitty quietly. "Whom has my Lord?" And, when she had heard the names, frowned.

"Sir Hugh! Now, he goes too far to bring that man as his associate. He shall see —" And she bit her lip. "Come, Sir Rupert," said she presently, "if my Lord shall not eat you, you shall at least eat my Lord's supper." And she led the way into a room in which a table was set out.

"'Tis left against my Lord's return," explained the Countess, with her sub-ironic tone; "he has a fancy to eat at odd hours."

Sir Rupert sat down, somewhat astonished, but in the seventh heaven of delight. The cousins had, from their appearance, been awakened from sweet sleep, and had dressed for the occasion, yet their costumes vastly became them.

"Sir Rupert would have been wholly at his ease had it not been for the thought of that wild Mohock company, now rendered the wilder by exclusion, that sought to run him to earth. He did not find much appetite, nor did the ladies, but sat fumbling somewhat awkwardly with his fork and his glass; and presently a servant comes up with the message that the Earl was clamouring for admittance to his own house, and in distress and fear together he begged orders of his mistress. She looked at Sir Rupert, where he sat, his boyish face full of embarrassment, and said she quite gravely —

"Open the window and tell them that my Lord is a very respectable man, as his wife should very well know, and one who would think shame to keep such abominable company as that noisy crew, or such disorderly hours. And say, Trench, that my Lord himself is long since admitted and gone to bed, glad to escape from such nocturnal bullies."

"Madam," stammered the young man, rising, "I put you to too great an inconvenience. I will leave you."

"There is no way out save in front," said my Lady coolly, and helped herself to a glass of wine and a cake. "I fear you must remain here, however much you mislike the company."

"Lord, Madam, 'tis not that!" he cried, blushing. "But I will go forth and join them in front. I fear not the savage pack."

"You shall not go," cried Cyrene, imperiously eager. "'Tis my fault; oh, 'tis my fault, Kitty. I should not have dropt word of Sir Rupert."

"Madam, I would fain think that you spoke of me often, and I would go to sleep the better believing it."

Lady Tiverton looked from one to the other. She uttered a little sigh.

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she said, in her strange voice, which had no sympathy in its expression. " Yet where be they now?"

She made a weary gesture with her fingers, and gazed with meditation on his fresh young complexion. The next moment the door was flung wide and my Lord Tiverton stood before them, rocking in a tempest of passion.

His wife neither turned colour nor moved, but fixed her eyes on him quietly. But he saw her not in his fury.

" You shall fight, Sir; by Heaven, you shall fight, and now," roared my Lord.

Sir Rupert, who had risen and was pale, made an answer stiffly and awkwardly.

" As you will, my Lord," and he glanced anxiously from Cyrene to the Countess.

My Lord Tiverton's eyes now took in the scene for the first time, and he stared, as one in bewilderment. As for my Lady, she sank back in a chair with a gesture of invitation towards Sir Rupert.

" Sir Rupert," said she coldly, " I beg you will finish your supper, if

you have such hard work before you. I am sure my Lord would not have you fight on an empty stomach."

Sir Rupert, scarce knowing what he did, fell into his seat again, and the Earl still stared at his wife and the supper-table before him. A grin began to run about his face.

" You shall not fight. There shall be no fight," declared Cyrene vehemently, and stood threatening my Lord with her angry face. He took her in, still with his spreading grin.

" Gad, Cyrene," said he, " you're mighty handsome that way, Miss, though too fair for me. I like a spice of smart. Who's this young buck, then, Kitty?" he continued; " and what does he here along of my Lady and her innocent cousin?"

The Countess looked at him, and a ripple of contempt went over her regular features.

" He is one that has escaped from a parcel of street braves," she said in her level voice.

" You lie," says my Lord sharply. " He is one that is taken



My Lord Tiverton stood before them.

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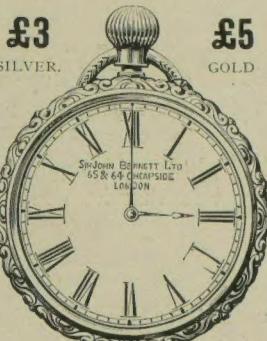
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after midnight in a gentleman's house, supping with his wife, and must answer for it."

"Sir—" began Sir Rupert hotly, but was silenced by the Earl's inattention. He was looking at the white, cold, beautiful face of his wife.

"There is many that have died on a lesser excuse, my Lord," she said in a hard voice.

"I shall not die! I will fight, but shall not die!" cried Sir Rupert passionately, for his blood was aflame alike at this truculent attitude to him, and at this brutal treatment of the lady.

"Nay, Sir Rupert Valence shall not die nor shall he fight," said Cyrene's voice, now tense and breaking in its tensity. "Tis no crime that he should visit me under my Lady's wing."

"You!" echoed Tiverton.

"We are—we are betrothed," stammered Cyrene.

Sir Rupert's heart bounded and then almost ceased to throb. My Lord stared in his uncivil way for a full minute, and then at Sir Rupert. He whistled.

"So that was it," said he at last. "That was the significance of the compact. May I perish, but I dubbed you maiden always, girl. Ye're

sly—slyer than I thought." He paused a moment, and then threw his sword into the corner with a clatter.

"Damme, Kitty, I'll spare Cyrene, if I never do another kindness. I'll forgive 'em, though they crossed me."

"My Lord," said Sir Rupert, awkwardly enough, "my sword is at your service when you desire it."

"Put it up; put it up. So be you make Cyrene happy. I forgive you," said the Earl good-humouredly. "Damme, Kitty, maybe your friends and you will make shift to make room for me at table. Cyrene, the bottle, Miss. Sir Rupert, your health and Miss's!" and he drank to them genially with all traces of his wildness gone.

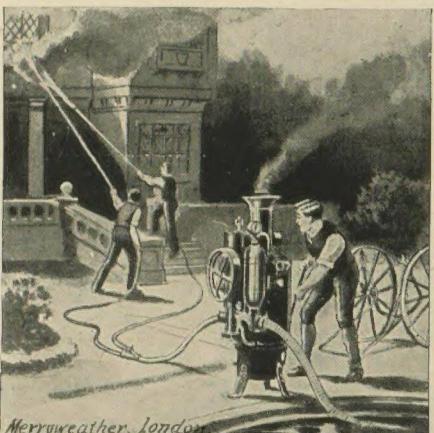
Upon the face of the Countess, who said nothing, Sir Rupert thought he could descry a little flitting smile. Was it of contempt? Or was it satisfaction? But he had no room in his mind for speculations of such sort. His gaze devoured Cyrene as avidly as my Lord the viands. She from white had gone pink, and avoided his eye. My Lord ate on heartily. There was an awkward silence. A sudden inspiration flashed through Sir Rupert's head. He poured out a goblet of wine and raised it.

"To our happiness, Cyrene," he said softly, and almost shyly.

As shyly Cyrene glanced up to him, and their eyes met.

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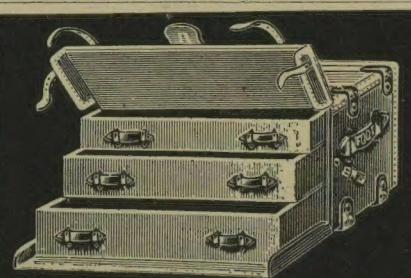
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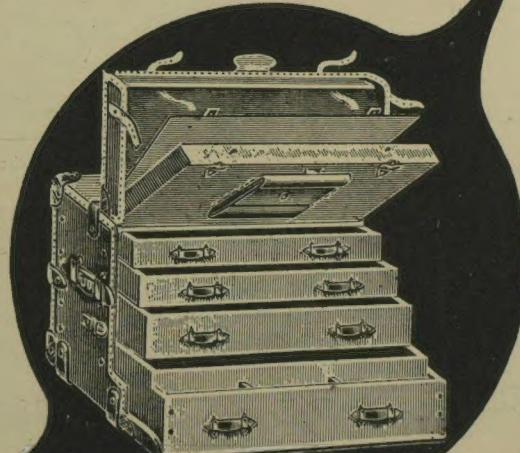
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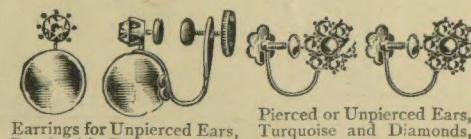
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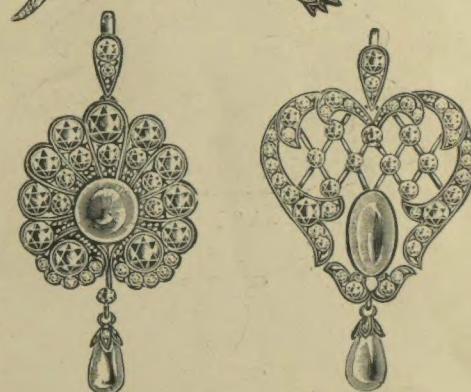
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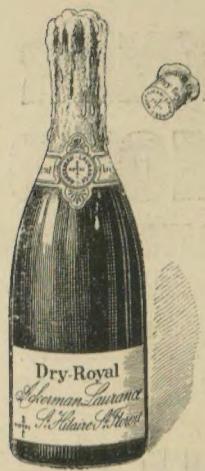
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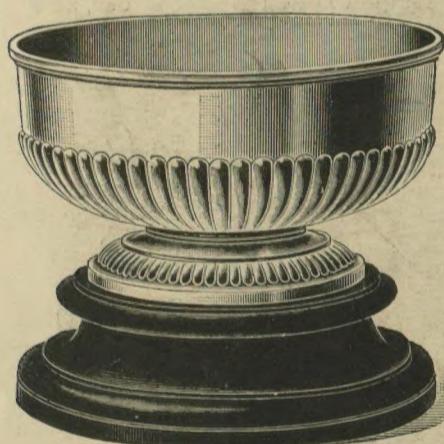


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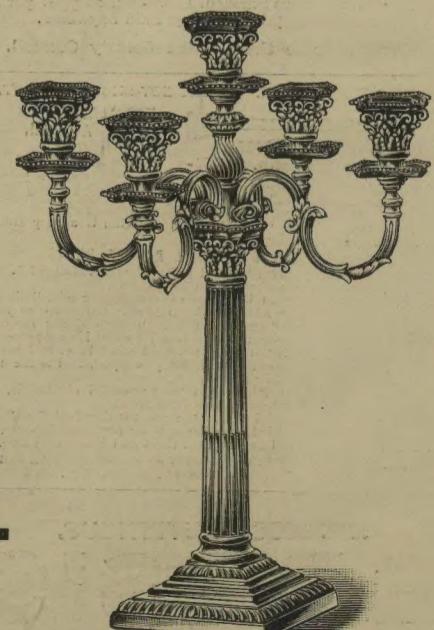
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